

This concise biography of one of the most important woman leaders of the twentieth century India who contributed both during the pre-independence and post-independence periods, brings to light the life and times of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. Written by an author who worked closely with her, the book traces the political, social, creative and above all, the human aspects of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay while placing her pioneering role during and after the freedom struggle in a proper perspective. The biography fulfils long felt need to have an authentic documentation of the life and achievement of this inspiring personality bringing out her contribution to the freedom movement, women's rights, human rights, living cultural tradition and performing arts.

Jasleen Dhamija is internationally renowned expert in the fields of Living Cultural Traditions and History of Textiles and Costumes. She worked in the development of Handicrafts in India during the crucial phase in 1950s and has been working on international level since 1970. Awarded Hill Professorship at the University of Minnesota, she has also been a Visiting Faculty to three universities in Australia. She has been organising major exhibitions latest being 'Textiles of the Commonwealth' for the Commonwealth Games, Melbourne, 2006. Closely associated with the UNESCO, she was commissioned to evaluate their work in the field of Crafts. Having written and published extensively, Ms. Dhamija is editing one volume of *World Encyclopedia of Dress and Adornment*.



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Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

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JASLEEN DHAMIJA



Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	vii
<i>Introduction</i>	xi
1. Early Beginnings, Childhood in Mangalore	1
2. The Youthful Kamaladevi	10
3. Political Life	21
4. Independence & After	58
5. The Handicraft Movement	66
6. Performing Arts	99
7. Women's Empowerment	110
<i>Epilogue</i>	119
<i>Bibliography</i>	124

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Foreword

The life history and struggles of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay in the political, social and cultural arena have been already extensively described and commented in many books, articles and no less than four biographies. There is of course much more to learn about her, as about any great person, but the basic facts about her life have now been carefully winnowed out from the husks of hagiography. The events marking the centenary celebrations of her birth in 2003 provided ample opportunities to confirm the eulogious and tributes to the multifarious roles of Kamaladevi as champion of women's rights, political activist and patron-saint of Indian Arts and Crafts.

This new biography by Jasleen Dhamija offers an interesting and original look at Kamaladevi's itinerary from several viewpoints. In the first instance, the author's approach is based on the interpretation of established facts through the kaleidoscope of her long personal association with Kamaladevi. As Dhamija points out in her introduction, she was "one of the few persons who could keep pace with her" and certainly "one amongst the legion of people she shaped". Through a series of personal touches and reminiscences, Dhamija's portrayal of Kamaladevi is as real and vital a force as one can hope to find in the world of biography. Her recollections from conversations with Kamaladevi are particularly useful for an insight in the true personality of this passionate but introverted woman: "One of the women travelling with us was bold enough to ask her of her experience as a widow. There was

a silence for a moment, for Kamaladevi never talked of her life. She however remarked 'Life went on as before for me, but it was hard on my mother.'

The accounts of Kamaladevi's dealings with distinguished players of the political scene like Mahatma Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and C. Rajagopalachari are full of intimate glimpses, which make interesting reading. One example among many others is the following observation after the description of Kamaladevi's call upon the youth to start civil disobedience: "I remember Kamaladevi chuckling as she told this story, that even Gandhiji who was always ten steps ahead of everyone, was caught unaware."

Dhamija looks at Kamaladevi with genuine admiration and yet without idolatry. In the same outspoken manner as her subject, she does not hesitate to pinpoint Kamaladevi's failings, whether in her relations with her son Rama ("Kamaladevi's complete absorption in her political life must have given the child a great sense of insecurity") or in her role as administrator, where she sees her "inability to delegate authority" as the key reason for many of her strong supporters to abandon her.

Another distinguishing element of this biography lies in the importance given to the impact of Kamaladevi's interventions in the crafts sector at the national and international level. Indeed, while her intense involvement with the body politic has been well highlighted in previous biographies, it is for the first time that the love of Kamaladevi for crafts and her pursuit for a renaissance of several neglected professions are given such prominence. As an internationally reputed expert who also devoted some 50 years to craft development and internationally called the 'Philosopher of Living Culture', Jasleen Dhamija is undoubtedly the ideal person to testify to the pioneer role of Kamaladevi in this field. This part of the book is to my mind the most interesting one, for it's a lively personalized account of the many visionary initiatives

taken by Kamaladevi, in the middle of the last century and which stand today as sources of inspiration for craft promoters in the rest of the world.

I admit to a personal and professional interest in this judgement because of my long-term involvement in UNESCO's crafts programme. Kamaladevi rightly foresaw that craft surveys were a *sine qua non* condition for enlisting government support to craft development programmes. UNESCO followed this approach and inscribed the gathering of qualitative and quantitative data as the first objective of its Action Plan for Crafts Development in the world. In another respect, Kamaladevi sensed well in advance that changing needs call for a novel strategy with closer links between designers, marketing outlets and the craftpersons. It is worth recording that her concept of 'Marketing Clinics' has given way today to design laboratories in many countries with rich craft traditions in Africa and Latin America. We cannot forget, of course, that it was through the initiative of Kamaladevi that the World Crafts Council came into being in 1964 and remains today the most important NGO partner for UNESCO's world programme. Last but not least, Kamaladevi's foresight led her to set up a dye research laboratory in Kalakshetra well before the movement for eco-friendly products. The first International Symposium on natural dyes which UNESCO is convening in Hyderabad in 2006 is perhaps the best tribute the international community can pay to this remarkable supporter of craftspeople.

On her death in 1988, President R. Venkataraman said he found it difficult to prefix the word "late" to Kamaladevi's name because "hers was and will always be a palpable presence". The biography by Jasleen Dhamija reminds us how relevant Kamaladevi's mission is today in India and the rest of the world, whether in her balanced vision of feminism, her driving interest in the performing arts or her belief in a holistic approach to the socio-cultural

and economic role of crafts. The lessons for us in this biography are many and delicately suggested. There could be no finer monument to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay than this passionate book by her disciple.

Indrasen Vencatachellum
Director
Cultural Department, UNESCO,
Paris

Introduction

The last century saw dynamic changes not only in India, but the world over in terms of the geo-political and economic environment, as well as an upheaval of socio-cultural moorings of societies. The struggle for freedom of the colonized half of the world and their emergence as sovereign nations, led to the emergence of new leadership, new concepts and ideas. It also gave greater power to women to participate in all aspects of life, to enrich their lives as well as contribute to the enrichment of society as a whole. Women emerged from the shadows finally.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was one such person, who emerged as an active participant in the political, socio-economic and cultural life of India. Hers is a story of courage to live in the world, to participate in it fully — to take up every challenge and meet it boldly.

Yet she paid a price for it; loneliness, frustration when she saw many of the institutions she built crumbling. I worked very closely with her from 1954 when she was Chairman of the All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB). I was one of the few persons, who could keep pace with her. Kamaladevi worked day and night, in her single minded effort to revive the cultural traditions, be it in the areas of crafts, of performing arts, of theatre or women's rights and bring them into the contemporary context. She studied the old ways of life recording many aspects, which were being lost. She was passionately involved in the movement for legislating equal rights for women, so that they could be equal partners in socio-economic and political spheres. She

had the ability to inspire people and through her own example changed their lives. I was one amongst a legion of people she inspired, shaped and who had a much richer life because of their association with her.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay is not only remembered the world over for being responsible for building the crafts world, for encouraging artists in all spheres of life, but also as a humane person, who wanted to enrich the lives of people irrespective of their caste, creed or nationhood. She fought for the rights of the young and old to live with dignity. She espoused the cause of the have-nots, the neglected, the forgotten and those who languished in prison for want of someone to fight for their rights and for justice.

Till the very end Kamaladevi was writing petitions, listening to the woes of those who had no one to turn to. Behind the expressionless face, which people often thought was humourless and unfeeling, was a passionate woman, a perceptive person, who felt things with great intensity but had learnt early in life to not demonstrate any emotion. It was she who rescued the large number of young Sikh boys, languishing in prison without trial by filing a writ petition. It was she who took up causes, which were not in the public eyes. It was she who financed a number of people when they faced problems, from her meagre resources. Everywhere one goes one hears: "She changed my life, she helped me when I had no support from any quarter." She helped a number of battered women, abandoned wives and widows without questioning, without sermonizing. There are cases of young boys whose school fees she continued to pay for years. The Secretary of Orissa branch of Bharatiya Natya Sangh, whose salary she paid for a number of years. She paid for the medical treatment of a number of masters of music, of crafts, thus saving their lives.

She shared her knowledge, her experience with innumerable persons and helped them achieve their goals.

Those of us who came in contact with her were fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from her experience and her faith in her beliefs.

I still remember her ringing me and telling me that her companion, her support, Shri U.S. Malliah had died suddenly. When I wanted to go to her, she said, "No don't come. I will send for you." When I saw her the next day she was at work burying her grief in a spate of activity and not allowing anyone to talk of him. Mr. Malliah had been her close associate for many years, whom she had come to know while organising the cadre of the Congress Party in Mangalore. She belonged to the upper caste Saraswat community of Mangalore, the Chitrapur Brahmins, who were mostly professional, highly educated and refined. Mr. Malliah, came from the Tullu speaking Bunts of lower caste. She was already a veteran of the freedom movement, when she met him and became his mentor and introduced him into the political field supporting him until he built his own political base, first in Karnataka and then in the entire Southern India. After Independence he became very useful to the UP dominated Congress Party in mustering support and keeping the Central Committee informed of the situation in Southern India. He was known as the kingmaker for he was involved in distribution of tickets, of masterminding the appointments of ministers and creating changes in the state politics to maintain the interests of the Congress Party. His bluff jocular manner, his unstinting support of his friends endeared him to many. He was most protective of Kamaladevi and they had a warm and very tender relationship.

Many have written about Kamaladevi and many more will research and write about her. Many will eulogise her, while others will criticize her. In the world of today when everything is changing and society is in a state of constant flux, when nothing remains static, situations will change and new insights will emerge and new ideas will evolve. Those who criticize her do not realize that she was a

pioneer. She had no previous examples on which to build her experience. It was the first time that a new nation liberated from colonialism was working towards the creation of a society of divergent peoples who had to learn to live harmoniously and to build a democratic society. The creative field not only was varied and dispersed and was a source of income for a large majority of the people at the lowest economic and social rung of society, but it also was closely linked with the ethos of the nation. She had to develop a philosophy, a concept and a plan of work, which could get support and this she did when nothing existed. It required great conviction and courage to develop programmes, evolve policies when there was no cogent past experiences as point of reference. To act and not be afraid of making mistakes and learn from them also required great courage.

I always thought that the Charles Eames Award to Kamaladevi for being the one single person in India who contributed the most to enrich the quality of life in India, was a fitting tribute to her. However, when I started my research for writing her biography I felt that this was only one aspect of her multifaceted personality. She was a remarkable person, whose life can be an example to many. Her indomitable will to follow the path that her belief dictated, was a true expression of her strength. She truly believed in the equality of all human beings and the right to live a life of dignity irrespective of caste, creed, status and gender and she lived her own life by those beliefs.

She never accepted other people's evaluation of a situation, she had to see for herself, to learn, to know and to act. In the earlier stages it was her strength, but later when the arena grew, when a number of people became involved, the inability to delegate authority and allow those who were responsible to take full responsibility, was her undoing and led to a number of her strong supporters to drift away from her.

1

EARLY BEGINNINGS CHILDHOOD IN MANGALORE

Kamaladevi was born on April 3, 1903 to a Saraswat Chitarapur Brahmin family in Mangalore. Her father, Ananthaya Dhareshwar was in government service and retired as a senior official. Though a self made man, he led a comfortable existence. Girjabai, Kamaladevi's mother, was his second wife and came from an affluent and aristocratic household. She had received some formal education, but was mostly self-taught. She had learnt to appreciate the importance of education from her mother, who was a *vidushi* (scholar) with the knowledge of the Vedas, Puranas, as well as mystical poets. She saw her mother not only absorbed in her rituals, but involved in dialogues with learned men. Kamaladevi recalled lying in her grandmother's lap and being lulled by her chanting. She humorously described an episode of her childhood, of sitting in her grandmother's seat and imitating her posture and holding her book upside down as she simulated the rhythmic chanting that her grandmother used, when she read her texts. Kamaladevi also admired her indomitable spirit, which led her to lead her own life without caring for other's opinion. Perhaps her love of travel was a legacy of her grandmother's adventurous spirit, as she visited her innumerable relatives and children, travelling alone by boat and bullock cart, before Mangalore became connected by rail, instead of leading the life of a widow, as a recluse, as society dictated.

The lush green garden of her home with its masses of

flowering plants was her first environment. In Kamaladevi's own words "The house itself had large grounds, thickly clustered trees, palm groves, climbing creepers, which converted the setting into an enchanting woodland." "I grew up in a most beautiful countryside. It seemed like a well-designed landscape. Nestling right under the rising Western Ghats, the town carried their stamp on it, its roads rising and falling. Two rivers encircling it, each holding one side in its arm. Across the beach was the Arabian Sea... So thickly wooded was the region, when one looked down from the hilltop at the town, one saw nothing, but thick greenery." When I went to Mangalore with her for the first time, she took me up the mountainside, so that I could see how Mangalore lay hidden beneath a canopy of coconut trees.

Not only was her childhood enriched by the beauty of the environment, but the rich traditions which were celebrated in her home and in her surroundings created a love of the cultural ethos of the people. Added to that was the presence of the two strong women. Her mother, Girjabai, who guided, disciplined and encouraged her throughout her life and her grandmother, whose strength of character, scholarship, love of knowledge and her great inner strength, which allowed her to pursue her own interests, despite the limitations placed by society on women, specially those who had been widowed.

Her mother was deeply involved in the new ideas being developed in India by Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and other social reformers, who challenged the limitations placed by society on women. Girjabai, though born during the late 19th century, was of a contemporary spirit. Her thirst for knowledge made her seek teachers, who taught her not only the written word, but opened doors to the new thinking and social changes, which were changing the rigid mores of the traditional society and its control on the lives of women. She was also greatly involved with the emerging freedom movement. Besides she had a great love

for music and learnt to play music on a number of musical instruments, including the piano. She also trained as a singer in the Carnatic and North Indian tradition.

Girjabai who had been deprived of a regular education was determined to provide Kamaladevi with the best of education available. She insisted that Kamaladevi attend a regular school instead of being taught at home, as was the practice in a number of families at the time. Kamaladevi was enrolled as a student at Saint Anne Convent. When she played truant and escaped from attending school, it was Girjabai, who insisted that she should attend school regularly, despite the more casual and indulgent attitude of her father.

Kamaladevi's father belonged to a group of progressive thinkers of the area, who were responding to the changing times. He was also very supportive of his wife in not only the pursuit of her interest, but in sharing his life. Yet he followed the dictates of custom and got Kamaladevi betrothed at an early age. Unfortunately, he died suddenly without a will. The entire fortune passed on to the elder son from his first marriage. Though the family house remained with her, Girjabai was suddenly deprived of the lands attached to the house and thus of her income. The large household with a number of dependents had to be curtailed, for her income had shrunk and she felt embittered that though the entire property was built by their joint effort after their marriage, she and her children inherited nothing. What they received was also by way of a family settlement. This left her insecure with a sense of great humiliation. This probably prompted Girjabai to formalize the marriage of Kamaladevi to Krishna Rao, the son of Nayapalli Subba Rao, one of the richest men of Mangalore. Kamaladevi was then 11 years of age.

In her various writings Kamaladevi says that she was quite fond of the family, into which she was married. They were progressive and highly educated. She used to go often to their house to read in their library and play tennis

and badminton. Krishna Rao, who was four years older, was also a nationalist and had taken the vow of Satyagraha. She was thus not averse to the marriage. The marriage however was never consummated, as Krishna Rao died within a year of the marriage. Kamaladevi, who had not left her family household after her marriage, continued her schooling. Her mother took the full brunt of protecting her from facing the barbaric customs, which were practiced on widows. Krishna Rao's family also did not insist that Kamaladevi live the secluded life of a child widow. Members of Nayapalli Subba Rao's family mention that the family treated Kamaladevi as a daughter after their son's death. When their papers were seen, letters written by Kamaladevi to her mother-in-law lovingly addressed her as Amma. Her father-in-law had promised Kamaladevi to send her abroad for further studies after her graduation. He considered her as a daughter and a daughter of his close friend, Dhareshwar, who had entrusted her care to him and his family.¹

Kamaladevi never touched on this aspect of her life. It is possible that her mother must have faced a lot of problems to overcome the disapproval of the community for not observing the ritual observances dictated by the circumstances. In Kamaladevi's "Awakening of Indian Women", she writes poignantly of the two and a half crores of widows as "Souls in agony". "They were", she says "disfigured and relegated to a life of servility with scant regard for their feelings or needs. They are even regarded as objects of ill-omen". Remarriage was still looked at "with dis-favour inspite of the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856". Girjabai may have moved away from Mangalore not only because of the failing health of her older daughter, to cosmopolitan Madras, but to take Kamaladevi away from the more conservative members of her community.

1. Information from interview with Tara Chandravarkar in Bangalore.

Girjabai encouraged Kamaladevi to not only follow assiduously in her studies, but to follow her interests in the burgeoning socio-cultural awareness about the status of women in the contemporary society. Her contacts with Pandita Ramabai's Sharda Sadan and Ramabai Ranade's Seva Sadan, both institutions for women's education and training, influenced her deeply and she set up a Mahila Samaj in Mangalore in 1910. She was able to get a large piece of land and build a centre with a library with badminton courts, which is in operation even till today. She read the new literature on the freedom movement on various activities, which were leading towards greater participation of women, sharing her readings with other women. In her autobiography, Kamaladevi mentions that she used to play badminton regularly at the Mahila Samaj for Girjabai believed in women's participation in sports. Many older women later told Kamaladevi that had it not been for her mother, they would have never learnt to read and write, as well as live a fuller life pursuing their own interests.

The visit of Annie Besant to Mangalore had a tremendous impact on Girjabai. Annie Besant was the first woman President of the Congress. She took Kamaladevi, who was then 10 years old, to meet her and asked Annie Besant to bless her, so that she could be a freedom fighter like her.

Girjabai appeared to be grooming Kamaladevi for active participation in the socio-political and national movements, which were beginning throughout the country. She told the child stories of Gargi, who challenged the sage scholar Yagnavallya to a debate. She told her of Maitreyi, who demanded that her learned husband should share his knowledge with her, defying the prohibition of women from learning Sanskrit. She instilled fearlessness in her and there were none of the fears of darkness in her, which were inculcated in girl children. Kamaladevi described an episode where she led on a man, who pursued her until she was able to reach a policeman, when she

cried for help and the miscreant was apprehended. When she related this story to her mother, she was praised for her bravery. Praise from Girjabai was rare and she was delighted that her mother approved of her. Girjabai was indeed open minded, for any other conventional mother would have disapproved of her child's adventurousness and taking of risks. After being left a widow and with little control over the fortune built by her husband had made Girjabai realise the precariousness of a woman's life. The unhappy life of her elder daughter, who was married to a cruel sadistic person, who never maintained her or their children, who treated her brutally leading to her death at a very early age, was a source of great sorrow for her. Kamaladevi's becoming a child widow was another blow and she was determined to not allow her to be traumatized by society. It was perhaps due to the difficult life that she had to lead that she had become quite embittered. Family members mention that she was not only domineering, but was withdrawn and some perceived her as a woman of quite harsh temperament. However, she was a nurturing mother and grandmother who took great care of her three grandchildren, Kamaladevi's son, Rama and the two sons of her elder daughter, Saguna.

For Kamaladevi the death of her two sisters from ill treatment meted out by their husbands left a lasting scar on her mind. Amba, her stepsister, who was married into a rich family of landowners, had a cruel husband, who was also a heavy drinker. He would beat his wife and she would never complain. She had eight children and with the cruel treatment of her husband died young. Her death was sudden and it plunged everyone into sadness. No one talked about it and Kamaladevi thought that perhaps her sister committed suicide. Her sister Saguna was beaten and ill treated by her drunken husband, after the death of their father and when she lay seriously ill in Mangalore he came to see her and took the children away with him, the only way he knew he could hurt her the most. This act of

his affected Saguna deeply and she withdrew into herself. The will to fight for her life left her and she soon succumbed to her illness. Kamaladevi felt the death of her sister acutely. She felt that women were cruelly treated and they should put up a resistance to it.

The richness of her childhood experience came from living a life, which embraced tradition on one hand and exposure to the world of change, of questioning and questing. Her father's progressive ideas, his involvement in the bringing about change in the restricted Brahmanical society, his encouragement of Kamaladevi to follow her own inclinations and yet give her the opportunity to study in a school and participate in all the functions with which he was involved, as a Senior Revenue Official, gave her confidence. The example of her grandmother, who lived the life of a scholar and a fearless woman, who travelled alone without fear of any social disapproval and adverse consequences, was a fitting example to Kamaladevi, who later travelled all over the world, often risking her life.

Girjabai, her mother was a dominant influence throughout her childhood and youth who sets an example by overcoming all difficulties without a murmur. She discarded meaningless social customs and observations. She championed the cause of women. Her conviction that a woman must educate herself, so that she could be independent and her insistence that Kamaladevi should not only study, but also participate in cultural activities and sports, enriched her daughter's life. Kamaladevi went with her mother to Seva Sadan and saw her exhorting women even older than her to become literate. She heard her read to them from the newspaper, magazines and extracts from books by social reformers and nationalists, followed by discussions and saw their attitudes changing. Girjabai's love for music was shared by Kamaladevi and she was encouraged to learn North Indian and Carnatic music. This love of music was a great source of peace for Kamaladevi in her later years.

The death of her father very early in life was traumatic for Kamaladevi. She lost the protective, loving father, whose pride she was and who cared for her unquestioningly. He would indulge all her whims, till his wife would put her foot down. Suddenly this loving protector was gone. She also found that all the comforts, the way of life that she had taken for granted, was only because of the father. The reduced circumstances, the disbanding of the sprawling household and departure of many families living in their compound, some of whom were her playmates, made her realise that her life would not have the colour and lavish celebrations and events as before. She says that she suddenly grew up and realised how important it was to pursue her studies and be able to stand on her own feet.

Girjabai had many causes for anxiety. First, she lost her husband, who was a buffer against the more conventional Brahmin families who disapproved of her progressive ideas and the way she was bringing up her younger daughter. Secondly, it also resulted in the loss of income, resulting in the need to curtail her expenses and live a much simpler life. All this made her bitter and pushed her to withdraw further into herself. Kamaladevi was greatly affected by these developments.

Kamaladevi became the focus of her life. Despite her independent spirit, she needed support of the society and though it must have rankled against her own beliefs, she arranged her daughter's marriage even before she had reached her teens. However, Kamaladevi continued to stay with her mother and kept on with her schooling. Kamaladevi's becoming a widow a year after her marriage was a blow to Girjabai. However, she did not allow her daughter to go through the horrifying ritual of widowhood and Kamaladevi's life continued at an even tenor. Her in-laws fortunately were also socially conscious and responsible and they did not demand that Kamaladevi come and live, as a widow in their home as was customary.

I remember that once when we went to a home for widows and abandoned women, she was visibly saddened to see the conditions in which they were living. One of the women travelling with us was bold enough to ask her of her experience as a widow. There was silence for a moment, for Kamaladevi never talked of her life. She however remarked, "Life went on as before for me, but it was hard on my mother."

Kamaladevi talks very evocatively in her autobiography, of her childhood being enriched by her participation in the rituals performed in her home, as well as the rich cultural life of Mangalore and its environs. The fields adjoining Kamaladevi's home after the harvest were used for performance of plays. *Biyalata*, literally plays in the field, were the name given to the Yakshagana performance. It was as she watched the folk play that her passionate love of theatre was developed. Kamaladevi also talks of the Bhutasthan where the large Bhuta figures presided. She describes how every village had their own Bhutashan where the priest Billava presided. The Bhuta was not only connected with ancestral worship, but was also a part of the life of the village. The community participated in the Kola ceremony, which is performed in the public interest and to which everyone contributes. There were also ceremonies such as the Dema, which are private ritual performance carried out in the home. Her graphic description of the ceremonies in her autobiography paint a picture of a childhood enriched by these experiences.

She also describes the ritual performances of the Koragas and melody of the flute, which she says "to this day those tunes haunt me, with the *le le* entwined with a soft strand of melody in the background, which nurtured me."

THE YOUTHFUL KAMALADEVI

Kamaladevi's next phase of development began when she lost her father. She says, "Emotionally my father had been my closest companion." He not only indulged her, but appreciated her free spirit. She looked for a father figure amongst the men, who entered her life. Her mother's brother, who was a well-known lawyer and social reformer, began to nurture her awareness of social inequalities and the need to participate in the movement for social change. He encouraged her to help him in his work and to also look after a number of visitors, who came to visit him. Thus early in her life she met Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Srinivas Shastri, Bhandarkar, Sir Chandavarkar, Justice Ranade and his wife Ramabai, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Sir Shankaran Nair and many other social workers. She listened to their conversation. She was drawn to other older men who were a great source of strength for her. Her mother however remained the strongest influence and support throughout her youth.

It is interesting that Kamaladevi refused to continue her studies at the Convent School because she could not accept their pro-British attitude and denigrating of the national movement. At first Girjabai was very upset and tried to persuade her to return to school, but later she respected Kamaladevi's decision and arranged for her to pursue her studies at home by engaging teachers to assist her.

Girjabai took her daughter, Saguna, for treatment to Madras. She decided to reside in this metropolis perhaps

drawn by Anne Besant and Margaret Cousin, who had always been a source of inspiration and whose example she always placed before Kamaladevi to emulate. She might have also felt the pressures of society and was afraid what impact the sanctions against widows would effect the maturing Kamaladevi.

In Madras, Kamaladevi joined classes at Queen Mary's College, where she met Harindranath Chattopadhyaya's sisters Subhasini and Sonalini. They drew Kamaladevi to the lively saloon presided by Mrinalini Chattopadhyaya at Aghor Mandir on the seaside at San Thome. The Aghor Mandir and the Chattopadhyaya saloon was the talk of the town and was the haunt of the youthful and ebullient intellectuals. For the conservative Brahmin society it was a gathering of "vagrants, villains, maidens and men."²

Mrinalni's saloon was dominated by the spirit of the Chattopadhyaya family, which was to rebel against the conventional society. Sarojni Naidu had married a man of her own choice without regard to any community or caste restrictions. Virendranath Chattopadhyaya was a revolutionary student leader in England and Mrinalini had a lively saloon, which broke all the taboos against men and women joining together to enact plays, to sing and dance and carry out lively discussions. She ran a magazine and entertained the talented artists and intellectuals, who visited Madras or resided there.

In the midst of this lively group was Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, the handsome younger brother, the darling of the family, acclaimed by everyone as a genius, who wrote plays, poetry, set his poems to music and sang them along with renowned musicians such as Abdul Karim Khan. Annie Besant had published a book of poems by Harindranath.

2. Nanda, Reena, *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay: A Biography*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002.

Kamaladevi was drawn to this ebullient atmosphere. She saw the young Chattopadhyaya girls as the women of the new age. They were equal to men. They could live their life on their own terms and were not dominated by the rigid rules of the orthodox society. Her great passion for theatre also found expression here. She recalls how in Mangalore when she was to act in a play at her school, the entire community had joined in a protest.

Harindranath's open admiration and pursuit of her was virtually like a siege. She was overwhelmed by the passionate poems he wrote to her. G. Venkatachellum, a life long friend of Kamaladevi, reminisced that Harindranath used to sing his most romantic songs in public as he gazed at her. The 16-year-old beautiful, shy, Kamaladevi attracted him because of her reserve, her deep involvement in traditions and a vibrant interest in the changing face of India. Kamaladevi in her interview with her biographer Kamala Ratnam³ mentioned that she was 14 years old when she saw Harindranath and was greatly impressed by him. When asked what attracted her to him, she made a strange remark: "I was not really attracted by him nor was I in love", it was his personality, which had her enthralled. He had, according to her, a charismatic personality, which was perhaps even more dominant than Sarojini Naidu's and she came under his influence. His brilliance, his openness, drew people to him and everyone found him irresistible. She also goes on to say that there was a very close bond between them and even when their ways parted, she felt a close link with him for he had convinced her that "his and my relationship was above the normal male and female relationship and I am still convinced of it."

Girjabai at first did not approve of Kamaladevi's involvement. But, Harindranath charmed her, as he knew

how to do. Yet when she finally gave her approval she stipulated two conditions. Kamaladevi would continue with her studies, as well as Harindranath would join them in Mangalore, as she was planning to return to be with her elder daughter, who was seriously ill in Mangalore.

Kamaladevi's break with her father-in-law was caused by her decision to marry Harindranath. When Girjabai informed him of the proposal of marriage, there was no objection. But, behaving like a father, he investigated the antecedents of the youngman and found that he was not suitable. He conveyed this to Kamaladevi and proposed that she continue her studies and then proceed for studies abroad, which he would finance, as promised by him. Kamaladevi did not accept his point of view. Members of the family recall that, this led to a stormy meeting, which resulted in Kamaladevi's breaking up her relations with the family.

We do not know whether Girjabai was aware that Harindranath, though acclaimed as a highly talented young man, was also highly temperamental and emotionally unstable. His affair with an older married woman in Hyderabad was seen as a young man sowing his wild oats. Marriage, it was hoped, would make him settle down and think of following a profession to support his family. There were protests from Kamaladevi's family members and some friends of the family, who pointed out all the possible difficulties that would be faced by the young couple.

Girjabai may have also felt that the unconventional milieu of the Chattopadhyaya family, would not only accept marriage with a widow, but would take it up as a cause celebre, as it would break the rules of the conventional society, which was still struggling against widow remarriage. She also felt that the family would nurture Kamaladevi's talents and allow her to participate actively in the socio-political reform movements. For Kamaladevi, according to G. Venkatachellum, lovingly called Venka, by his friends, she was completely charmed by the open

3. Ratna, Kamala, *Kamaladevi: Ek Sampriti Vyaktitav*, Alokha Prakashan, Delhi.

admiration of the young genius, who was acclaimed by the new emerging revolutionary society as their poet, their dramatist and their bon vivant. She was also most excited by his dreams of setting up a drama group and performing throughout the country, carrying the message of freedom, of equality of women, of the cultural renaissance.

Kamaladevi and Harindranath got married in 1919. The ceremony was the unconventional registered civil marriage. It was hailed as a romantic marriage between two people, who defied all conventions. Kamaladevi was a young girl of 16 years and had entered into a marriage with a highly volatile individual, who was considered a genius not only by the family, but by the intellectual world. Annie Besant had published his book of poems "Feast of Youth". Annie Besant was a dominant influence on Girjabai and Kamaladevi and her approval of Harindranath must have influenced their decision to go through with the marriage.

The mother and daughter did not realize the strong ties, which bound the Chattopadhyaya family together. Mrinalini Chattopadhyaya orchestrated not only the saloon, but also the lives of her siblings. As Kamaladevi remarked, later "Marrying a Chattopadhyaya was to marry all." It is also strange that Mrinalini, who was a free spirit, but when it came to her own sister-in-law joining the university she did not give her approval. The Chattopadhyaya family had accepted Kamaladevi as one of the family, but they felt she was not their equal in either education or sophistication. All the decisions of the family were controlled by Mrinalini. Mrinalini, who doted on her young brother, did not allow him to keep his promise of going with Girjabai to Mangalore. The young couple were made to come and stay with her in her house immediately after the marriage. Within a couple of months of their marriage, Mrinalini, without consulting Kamaladevi in fact purposely keeping her in the dark, arranged for Harindranath to study at Cambridge. Kamaladevi learnt

of it only after all the arrangements had been made. After Harindranath's departure, Mrinalini lost interest in her young sister-in-law, who then returned to Mangalore.

In Mangalore Kamaladevi's elder sister Saguna was seriously ill. Despite the best medical treatment Saguna died. For Kamaladevi it was a very traumatic experience to see the death of her young sister because of the gross neglect and mal treatment of her husband.

To be separated from her husband after only a few months of marriage must have been a frustrating experience. Both the mother and the daughter must have hoped to return triumphantly to Mangalore with Harindranath so as to have the support of a man on their return to a society, which had made life difficult for them. They had instead to give explanations for his absence.

However, Kamaladevi did not sit quietly in her home, waiting for her husband to return, as was a common practice in those times. She decided to join him in England and pursue her studies. The family proved supportive and she was able to leave for England in 1921 to join him. We are told that she sold her jewellery to do so.

During this period Kamaladevi while pursuing her new interests in Madras, had also experienced the most important event of her life, her first meeting with Gandhiji in 1919 when she took the pledge to devote her life to the Satyagraha movement.

Her social awareness of the inequalities in society at the economic and social level had become of deep concern for her. In her autobiography she describes that she came to England "to pursue the normal academic studies with the hope of continuing her piano lessons". When she was asked by a Senior Professor of Newman College, Susan Sleeming "You seem to have a definite mind of your own – Do you propose to become an academician?" The question startled her and made her think as to what did she really want to do and her response was "No, I want to be educated to serve society." "Oh! A social worker! I can fix

you up, but for that you don't need a scholastic career."

Thus, she did not pursue her academic studies at Cambridge, but decided to pursue a Diploma in Sociology, which combined field experience in social work at Bedford College in London. She realized that to prepare herself for her life of Satyagraha, of serving the country, academic study would not be useful. Her determination to pursue her course is demonstrated by her relating the episode of the principal of Bedford College refusing her admission because of her mode of dress.

"The Principal of Bedford College then, one Miss Luke, a very elderly lady, however thought otherwise. She gave one quick look and abruptly started to turn me out. No, she could not admit me for this course. Crestfallen, I sought an explanation even as she started leading me to the exit. With blazing eyes she broke out: You realise you will have to work in the East End of London and you simply cannot go there in that weird garb of yours. The alleys are haunted by wild urchins who would soon chase you out. I don't suppose you propose to change your costume, do you? I halted my steps and turned to her: No, I don't. But please remember if I take on this course, those urchins would be seeing me every single day for weeks, months, years. They are bound to soon become bored staring at my dress or chasing me. They will look for some other novelty for excitement. Let us try it out. If I am prepared for a trial, why don't you let me? She looked annoyed, but had no ready answer. I siezed the moment and took her non-plussed silence as consent. I got my admission."

"The sociology course proved immensely practical and useful to turn me into an efficient social worker. Luckily sociology had not then become a discipline to turn into a bookish affair, as now."

The practicals took her to the old "notorious East End of London, which World War II had rendered just a sad memory. The afternoon was spent mostly in different institutions, educational and corrective for adults and

children. The evenings were passed in workers clubs or institutes". England during that period did not have active Labour Unions, which later set up educational, social and cultural institutions. She felt that this experience gave her a good grounding in the approach to the different sections of society that developed in the slums and their varied needs. She worked throughout the day starting at eight in the morning and in the evening attended to the workers' evening classes.

Harindranath joined her in London and they had their first home together in simple lodgings. It was perhaps during this time together that they built their relationship. Harindranath had lost interest in the academic pursuit and was drawn to politics and they together shared an active life, meeting young students, political activists and artists.

The students were generally drawn to Marxist ideology, which espoused the cause of independence and freedom from colonial powers. The English society did not mix with the students from the colonies. It was only the Marxist groups, which were open-minded and accepted them as equals. Harindranath was drawn to the Marxist ideas and began to participate in the debates on Indian politics.

In 1922 Kamaladevi and Harindranath travelled through Europe and met Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, the eldest of the Chattopadhyaya clan and the most brilliant of them all. He had come to Oxford to study in the beginning of the century, but had become involved in politics and became a member of a revolutionary group. He lived, as an exile in Berlin and that is where the young couple met with him. It was a very memorable meeting for Kamaladevi. Kamaladevi's description of him is most poignant "Viren stood out as the most commanding and also the most tragic figure. His one great longing was to return home... his one passion was freedom for which he became emotional and as he talked his eyes grew misty." It was he,

who, according to Kamaladevi had a great influence on her. "Talking to him was highly educative. My political horizon widened steadily, the Indian scene became clearer with different forces emerging, as they stood arrayed on either side of the battlefield. For the first time I became widely aware of the Indian economic conditions and its place as a colony in the British Empire. I began to see India's freedom struggle in a much clearer perspective in all its complexities."

Berlin was politically educative and intense, it also opened the doors of the art world. With Suhrawardy from Calcutta, who was an authority on European art, she visited art galleries and theatre. The Moscow Art Theatre, which had been set up by Anton Chekov and Eisenstien Stanislavasky, was playing in Berlin. Seeing Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard*, opened a new dimension" of theatre to Kamaladevi.

Harindranath and Kamaladevi returned to India in 1922 and joined Girjabai in Mangalore. Away from the dominating influence of his sisters, Harindranath was relaxed and happy in the beautiful surroundings of Dhareshwar Gardens. He was full of national fervor and began to learn Hindi. They both plunged into their plan for setting up a repertoire theatre group. Kamaladevi describes her intense involvement "and now at last I was going to taste the fulfilment of my ambition to act on a real stage. I felt almost shaken by a new passion. I threw myself wholeheartedly into the theatre vortex." Harindranath wrote plays in blank verse and also set the music. They created new properties and began to tour India with their small group. These were the happy times that they spent together. The golden couple, representative of the emerging new India, working for freedom, working towards rediscovering the past and merging it into the emerging contemporary life, free of inhibiting social norms, which did not allow women to work alongside their partners.

In 1923 Kamaladevi's son Ramakrishna Pramahans



1. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay at the First National Music Award Festival, Red Fort, New Delhi, 1954. President Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Vice President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan can also be seen



2. With Shri Jawaharlal Nehru



3. With Smt. Sarojini Naidu



4. A photograph taken in her early years



5. With her son



6. With Acharya Kriplani



7. Presenting the National Music Award, 1980 as Chairperson, Sangeet Natak Akademi



8. With Rukmani Arundale

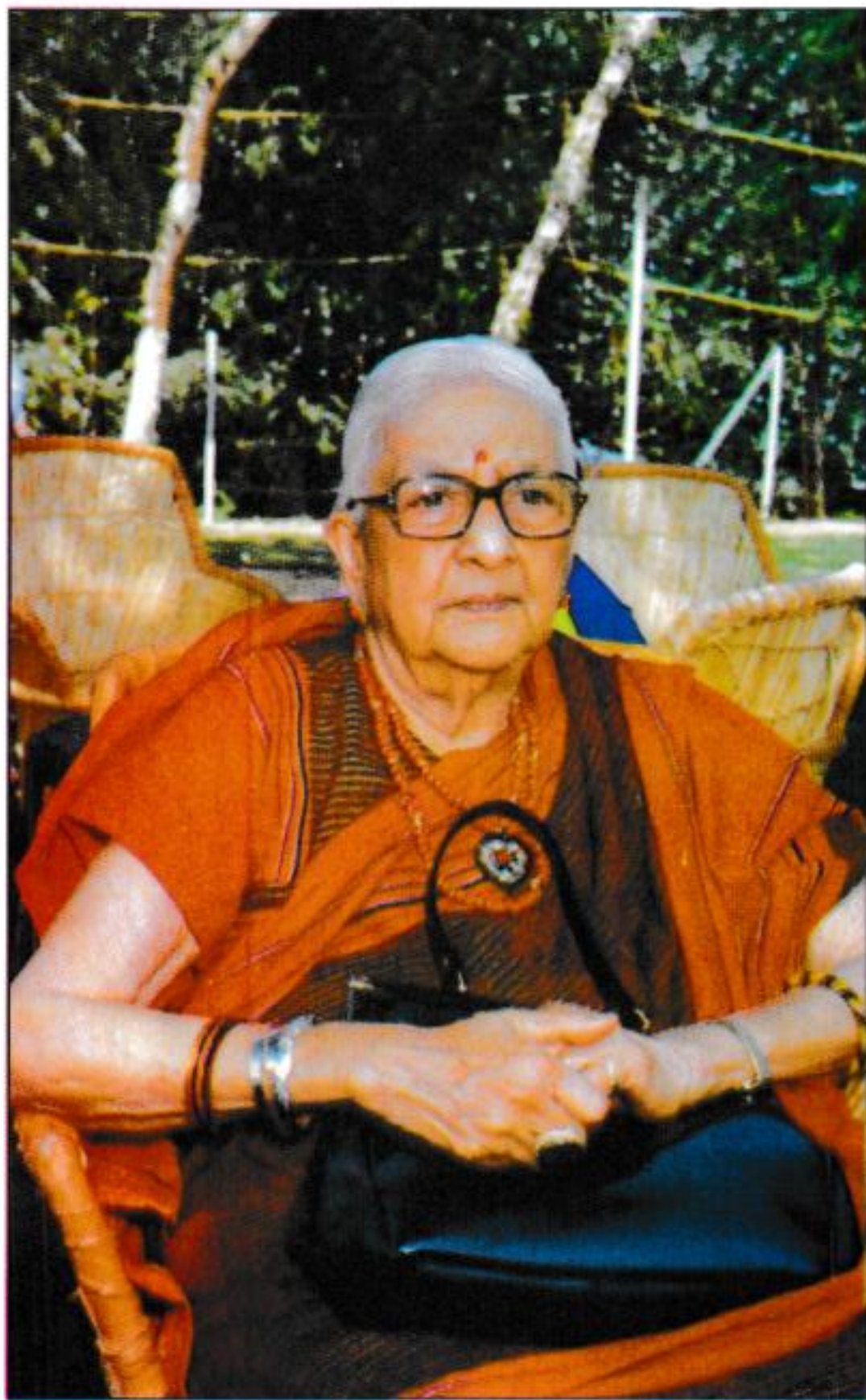


10-11. One Moment: Two Moods



9. Receiving the D.Phil Degree conferred on her by Banaras Hindu University from the Maharaja of Banaras Dr. Vibhuti Narain Singh at a special convocation at BHU, 1982





12. A Portrait

Chattopadhyaya was born. Girjabai took over the nurturing of Rama as Kamaladevi was travelling with the theatre group. When Rama was yet a very young boy, he joined his parents and participated in the plays as he had a very fine voice.

In 1924 Kamaladevi agreed to be a volunteer at the Congress Session in Belgaum and that led to a change in the direction of her life.

Despite these developments, her married life had become quite tempestuous. Harindranath's mercurial temperament, his rapid mood changes and tantrums had made life quite untenable for Kamaladevi. The Chattopadhyaya family instead of being supportive of Kamaladevi, looked at her as having outmoded ideas about marital fidelity and marital life. They encouraged Harindranath's temperamental behaviour and according to some friends his periodic flirtations and even serious affairs. Harindranath, it appears from Kamaladevi's revelation to Kamala Ratnam, was always seeking new experiences and was attracted to women and they in turn to him. His earliest experience of a deep attraction to an older married woman affected him very deeply. This is the only time that even the Chattopadhyay clan warned Kamaladevi of Vinodini's influence. Vinodini had come to meet Kamaladevi after their marriage and Harindranath had resumed his relationship with her, he admitted that she was the mother of his first child, a baby girl.

Another incident, which Kamaladevi narrated to Kamala Ratnam was how Harindranath, while accompanying his sister on a train journey, charmed a young school girl travelling with her mother and got the girl's address. When accosted by the angry father of the girl for writing her a letter, he was defended by his sister, Mrinalini, who said "He is a poet. He can write to your daughter, to a flower, to another girl or a rainbow."

Strangely enough, Harindranath took up an affair with Seetha Amma, who was looking after Rama. This

irresponsible behaviour so close to home was difficult for Kamaladevi to accept. However, later in life it was Kamaladevi, who looked after Seethamma until her death.

There was also the case when during Harindranath's trip to the United States he took up with an American woman, Ragini Devi, who was married to an Indian businessman, Bajpai, who had written bitter complaints to Congress leaders, including Gandhiji, who had given him letters of introduction, against the advice of other leaders. While Kamaladevi was in prison with Sarojini Naidu, Ragini Devi had arrived in India carrying what some people claimed was Harindranath's child. Harindranath denied that it was his child and disappeared from the scene. Ragini Devi, who delivered on the ship, got stranded. Kamaladevi, who was in prison asked friends of the family to help the lady and give her shelter. This was Indrani Rehman's mother. According to some, Indrani was his child.

Harindranath's taking to drink was another great sorrow for Kamaladevi. Venka used to say that Kamaladevi's deep antipathy to even social drinking was because of the ugly scenes that used to occur because of her husband's excesses. She was probably reminded of the life of her two sisters and she had no desire to end her life in that manner.

Her life with Harindranath was stormy and it made her realize that her salvation was in a total involvement with the freedom movement. Though she involved herself in the movement, she somehow could not break up her marriage. As she says, the traditional role of the woman as the nurturer prevented her from taking the final step. In fact, Gandhiji said to her "If you cannot free yourself, how can you fight for freedom."

3

POLITICAL LIFE

"To those of my generation the real history of India begins with the Gandhi era. All that went before..... were sporadic eruptions symptoms of desperation." Kamaladevi saw Gandhiji for the first time in 1917 when he came to Mangalore. She was completely swayed by his speeches, by his deep-set eyes, which exuded such strength and by his passionate involvement with the fight for freedom.

Girjabai had nurtured the independent spirit in her daughter. She had help up Annie Besant as a role model for her to emulate. It was Annie Besant, who was the first woman to preside over the Indian National Congress in India. However, it was Gandhiji, who fired her imagination.

Kamaladevi was a young student not yet sixteen when she was fascinated by the Champaran movement initiated by Gandhiji to redress the condition of the indigo plantation workers, who lived in abject poverty and inhuman conditions. She was at that time becoming more and more aware of the inequalities in society, in social and economic terms all around her and she was unable to come to terms with it. For her, Gandhiji's deep compassion for an exploited people and involvement with a people's struggle for changing their living condition was not an abstract idea, but of politics involved with real issues, which affected the lives of people.

Kamaladevi, like many of her generation, was deeply influenced by the way Gandhiji responded to the needs of the people. Kamaladevi wrote after "the unbelievable

massacre of Jallianwala Bagh. Instantly came Gandhiji's call for a day of fast and prayer for the big plunge: Satyagraha. Self-purification before going into any great venture." The idea of espousing the path of truth, of non-violence was a novel idea. To use it as a political weapon of non-aggression was fascinating, but difficult to comprehend for many. It had been an approach of religious leaders in the past, but not a weapon to be used against an aggressive exploitative enemy.

Gandhiji was starting a Satyagraha Sabha and those who took the pledge were expected to oppose all unjust laws and court imprisonment. They would not only pledge themselves to a non-violent civil disobedience movement, but also wage a battle against all imported goods by espousing Swadeshi, to only use the products made in India. The Swadeshi movement would also work towards the revival of the age-old traditions and free the thinking of the educated elite who were enslaved by western thought. Gandhiji talked of freedom not only from the political colonial yoke, but also the intellectual influences. Kamaladevi was greatly attracted to his penetrative holistic thinking. Her first political action was to take the Satyagraha pledge. Then she travelled all the way to Bombay to hear him speak and to take the pledge. This she did in the midst of all the new involvements, which had entered her life, during her stay in Madras.

The next venture of Kamaladevi into the political circles was when she responded to the call for volunteers for the Belgaum Congress Session in 1920. It was perhaps the hope of being able to work with Gandhiji that was the greatest incentive for her. However, it was her first experience of what the future would hold for her. The remarkable social worker Umabai Kandapur was responsible for training the women volunteers. The volunteers lived under very austere conditions. Braving the chill winter, they were made to live a disciplined life of long route marches, night vigils and very basic food. She soon realized that during

the session, the volunteers were like dog's body, doing all the in-essential and essential duties, but far from the actual session where Gandhiji and other Congress leaders carried out their deliberations.

Dr. Hardikar, a political worker, who headed the Seva Dal in Hubli met Kamaladevi in Mangalore and was greatly impressed by her boldness, her sharp intelligence and a certain quality of reticence in her overall personality. He was keen that she come and join Seva Dal on a permanent basis by leaving her theatrical career. Though she took the pledge to serve the Seva Dal as a volunteer, she was not willing at this point to make a more permanent commitment. She returned to Mangalore after the Belgaum Congress, but promised to keep her link with Seva Dal and Dr. Hardikar by writing for the Seva Dal Journal. This initiated her into writing, which became a source of strength for her. She wrote "While acting elated me, writing relaxed and put me at ease. Moments of deepest distress or depression are lightened when I start writing."

Kamaladevi felt that her public career began after meeting Mrs. Margaret Cousins, who was called Greta, by her friends. It was on her return to Mangalore after working as a volunteer in Belgaum that she met Greta for the first time, who was at the end of her tenure as head of the National Girls's High School. Kamaladevi had tasted independence from the restrictions of home and she must have felt confined by the everyday life of domesticity. Greta with her vibrant personality, her broad based interest in books, poetry, music and paintings, her political awareness and her organizational ability had all the qualities that Kamaladevi wanted to emulate. In 1966 Kamaladevi wrote how Margaret Cousins's influence was the most important in shaping her personality.⁴ "Margaret

4. *Bharat Jyoti*: January 23, 1966, Reflections after 60.

Cousin was one of those rare public figures who was clean, forthright and absolutely sincere and loyal". For Kamaladevi, Margaret was all that she wanted to be an intellectual with an open mind, a connoisseur of the arts, an accomplished pianist and a person who created an atmosphere of peace and beauty and nurtured others. For Kamaladevi, she was the mother who nurtured all aspects of her being and Margaret treated her like a daughter, talking affectionately, lovingly and with admiration for her "beloved daughter".

It was Margaret Cousin, who persuaded Kamaladevi to stand for the Madras Legislative Council. She mustered support, organized the campaign with a group of volunteers and created a campaign free from recriminations. She introduced music and cultural shows for the first time as a part of the campaign. At this point of her career, when she was being launched, Harindranath was very supportive. He plunged into the fray and Margaret wrote how he sang his national songs in the villages and won a number of votes for Kamaladevi. Their band of volunteers were known as the Blue Lotus volunteers. Though they had a very limited time to organize the election campaign, Kamaladevi might have won, if the election had not been linked to the Central Assembly candidate, which made one set of voters change sides at the last minute. However, Kamaladevi lost by a small margin.

Margaret did not take this as a defeat. She was determined to launch Kamaladevi in her political career. Margaret was already involved with the women's movement as an office bearer of The Women's Indian Association. She now began working on organizing a national conference for formulating educational policy for women. This led to the formation of the All India Women's Educational Conference, which played a pivotal role in the life of women, who participated in the National Movement.

The conference was Kamaladevi's first opportunity to meet veteran women leaders of the time. As the conference

came to a close, Sarojini Naidu, probably at the insistence of Margaret, proposed that Kamaladevi become General Secretary of the Conference. During her vote of thanks Sarojini Naidu announced that though Kamaladevi had declined to take on the post of General Secretary of the Conference, she had been persuaded. In her usual flamboyant manner, which always enthused the audience, she said "Her spectacular performance blazed a new trail for Indian womanhood. We should congratulate ourselves that what has been a loss for one state has been a gain of the entire country". Though Sarojini Naidu might not have really meant what she spoke, these words, became a reality.

For Kamaladevi becoming the General Secretary of an all Indian body was a great leap forward from the role of a volunteer. From participation at the state level of volunteers to move into the position of Secretary of a national body was a very onerous task. Kamaladevi was most hesitant to take up this task, but Margaret persuaded her to take up the work and promised to guide her. Kamaladevi knew that with Margaret as Chairman of the Standing Committee to guide her, she would be able to learn what was required of her on the job. She had always liked to work with Margaret, who was her role model.

Margaret Cousin talked of Kamaladevi as highly intelligent and motivated and in no time she mastered her duties and organised her work plan. With a young assistant she was able to build up a network throughout the country. She was now launched into her public life, travelling, addressing public meetings, addressing the question of legal and social changes necessary to give women their rights and equal status in the society. During her stay in Pune and her work at the Conference, she had to deal with different types of people and institutions. She built a number of relationships, which acted as a support system to her throughout her life.

It was during this period that she realised what

intellectual freedom was when she met people of stature, who had devoted their life in the pursuit of their beliefs. The brilliance of the Chattopadhyas, the Lotus clan, as they were known, since each of their names was for the lotus, was surface brilliance of a spoilt elite, whose pursuits of reform or social work was practiced only when it did not infringe on their lives.

Shri G.K. Deodar and Shri Kodana, who were members of the Servant of India Society, became close friends of Kamaladevi. Through their friendship, she gained new insights. She was charmed by Shrinivas Shastri. She describes him as "an impeccable gentleman, faultlessly dressed – in a dhoti and turban, elegant manner, nevertheless with an air of asceticism." She talks of his style of speaking, which impressed her greatly. It "had clarity of thought, a hard core of substance, which stays back in the mind of the audience as against a flashy, frothy, clever talk, which leaves thin vapors hanging". She had shared the platform with him once in 1923 in Mangalore, when she was just entering politics and he was already a seasoned speaker and politician, pleading the cause of Indians in South Africa. It was on his style of speaking and of Annie Besant's that she modeled her own style. It was these persons, who nurtured her spirit with their zeal to serve India, to inspire the youth and build a new world.

During this time she also met young women of her own age who followed the path of social reform. One of them was Shakuntla Pranjpai, the mother of the film director Sai Pranjpai, who went abroad for academic studies and turned towards social work. On returning to India she set up the first Family Planning programmes for education of the people, when the subject was taboo amongst polite society. The free independent women "with an air of ease and freedom" were a part of the emerging India, where wide scale socio-cultural changes were taking place and they were active participants in this revolution.

Kamaladevi had a way of winning over the senior and seasoned game players of the political scene, without knuckling down under their rather patriarchal attitudes. While lobbying in Simla for Prevention of Child Marriage Act, Rameshwari Nehru fixed up a meeting with Motilal Nehru. Kamaladevi writes "He surveyed me, it seemed to me with some amusement as he asked me for the purpose of my visit. I told him I wanted him and his party to support the pending bill. I can't explain what made me suddenly stress, 'You will want you?' He broke out into rather a strident note: 'Are you trying to instruct me and my colleagues how to vote, you cheat of a girl'? Far from wilting, I stood up to say, 'If your objection is to my age, I will bring a batch of old women to seek your vote! With that, I turned on my heels and almost ran out of the room, as he shook with loud laughter!' As she said 'Far from causing a breach, the incident led to a softening of his encounters with me.' He used to relate the story with embellishments to his colleagues and point to her saying 'This is a dangerous woman. She once threatened to have me mobbed by a crowd of old women unless I took instructions from her how to conduct myself in the Legislative, especially how I vote?'

Motilal Nehru invited Kamaladevi to visit them in Allahabad. Rameshwari Nehru gave her an assignment, which took her to Allahabad. She was quite enchanted by the ambience of the household. She described Motilal Nehru as dominating the scene as his powerful presence filled the scene, there hardly seemed room for anyone else. He also had great warmth, which drew everyone into his orbit. "However, he was not able to dominate his son, who held his own." Kamaladevi witnessed the heated arguments between the father and son, which were sharp, penetrating and politically astute and Jawaharlal held his own and did not allow his father to brow beat him.

In 1927 Kamaladevi became a member of the Congress Party and was asked to organize Volunteer Corps for the

Madras National Congress Session and as she says thus she seriously began her political career with a broom and a basket, to clean up before, during and after the session.

She came into close contact with Shri Venkataraman, a member of the Servants of India Society, who asked her to serve as one of the secretaries of the Social Reform Conference. This opened up new "avenues of thought and action", as well as perceptions, specially in the role of women. In 1928 she was elected to the All India Congress Committee as the leadership had become aware of her organizational abilities as well as dedication.

Yusuf Meherally, a youth leader, approached Kamaladevi to join the youth movement. Many "young people pressed on me", Kamaladevi's notes in her autobiography, "to join the Youth Congress." They felt that though in 1927 Jawaharlal Nehru at the Madras Congress had moved for complete Independence, this had been diluted, at the Calcutta Annual Conference presided by Motilal Nehru. The youth movement felt that at the next session of the Congress to be held in Lahore, this position should be rectified and Poorna Swaraj, complete Independent status, should be declared as the goal of the Congress.

In 1929 she was elected President of the Youth Congress session in Ahmedabad. Her vibrant address, her forthrightness and her beauty drew a lot of young women and men into the movement. This was indeed when Kamaladevi came into her own, when she was able to carry forward a motion for "Swaraj" — complete Independence of the country. As Reena Nanda quotes from Indian Annual Register 1929 Vol. II that "she deplored the tendency to 'glibly declare independence hoist flags, but doing nothing to justify it.'" Kamaladevi called upon the youth to start civil disobedience, declare an Independent Republic, start a parallel government and do it at any cost and sacrifice, if need be, their lives.

This clarion call of the youth in a way forced the hands of the leadership and I remember Kamaladevi chuckling as

she told this story, that even Gandhiji, who was always ten steps ahead of everyone was caught unaware. Just a few weeks before he had signed the pledge for Dominion Status. When he read the writing on the wall, he supported the call for complete Swaraj. At the Lahore Session on June 26th 1930 Jawaharlal Nehru declared complete and full Independence as the goal for the freedom movement. It was the triumph of the youth. Kamaladevi did not attend the Congress Session as on the way by boat from Karachi, Harindranath had got into a drunken rage and people feared for his sanity and the harm he could do to Kamaladevi. The adulation of the 4000 youth, who had responded to Kamaladevi's call was too much for him. As Venkatachellum had said that Harindranath was extremely jealous of her popularity and her rising prominence in the political scene. We are told that Rama's illness prevented her from going, so she could not share in the eventful end of the year 1929 when on 31st December Jawaharlal Nehru unfurled the flag on the banks of the Ravi and launched the call for Swaraj. Nor was she there to hear that the Congress had appointed her as the head of the Women's Committee of the Seva Dal.

Gandhiji declared January 26, 1930 as the Puran Swaraj Day and he drafted a pledge for all the people. A memorable episode took place in Bombay (now Mumbai) on January 1930 at Chowpahty when Kamaladevi and others planted the Congress Flag. A group of trade unionists tried to hoist the red flag. In the ensuing struggle the Congress flag was nearly torn down. Kamaladevi jumped into the fray and held on to the flag, though a number of persons of the other party tried to tear her hands away from the flag post. She however clung to it tenaciously and she was injured along with Yusuf Meherally. This episode was talked about and songs were written and sung. It became a memorable part of the history of freedom.

The next great moment came when Gandhiji announced the launching of Civil Disobedience Movement by

breaking the Salt Law. According to this law, people could not make salt. The local salt would be also highly taxed, forcing the Indians to buy the imported salt. The leadership and the cadre of workers, who had been waiting to hear, which great task would launch the Civil Disobedience movement, were astonished, by Gandhiji's declaration. No one understood how a fistful of salt could be the beginning of the Civil Disobedience against the all-powerful Imperial Government. Kamaladevi too could not understand how Gandhiji had chosen this as the momentous issue. 'Is that all our Great Leader could device?' I asked haltingly from Jawaharlal. He gave a knowing nod and with a flicker of a smile said "You have yet to learn his ways. We cannot always grasp his ideas in their entirety. But rest assured there is a method in his madness." And this certainly was the case, for the simple humble handful of salt was a necessity of every household and the common man could identify himself with the handful of salt as his most important need. The Salt Commission had recommended that Indian Salt should be so highly taxed that the people would be forced to buy British Salt. It also had another connotation for the Indian freedom fighter, they did not want to partake of the British salt.

On 14th March at 6.30 am the Salt March was to start for Dandi from the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad to the seaside at Dandi, which was 240 miles away. Gandhiji excluded the women from participating. Kamaladevi challenged Gandhiji and made him change his decision. The women did participate in the mass Civil Disobedience movement against the Salt Law from April 6th. Kamaladevi plunged into the Civil Disobedience leaving behind her former life. She resigned from the Secretaryship of Women's Conference and devoted herself entirely to the Women's Section of the Seva Dal to organise the active participation of women in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Kamaladevi gives a very graphic description of the

launching of the Salt Satyagraha: "The pearl grey April morning sky was brightening into crimson as I walked down the street. Already crowds were beginning to collect and line the roadside, their faces aglow with a new excitement. It was the 6th of April, the day on which India was launching her revolution. Mahatma Gandhi, the supreme leader, had decided to initiate it by breaking the Salt Law, the law that the British had imposed. To him the appropriation of this right was symbolic of the exploitation of the large masses of the country. Salt was about the only luxury the rapidly impoverished Indian peasant had got reduced to, and now even that had been snatched away from him. A tremor of revolt ran through the land. The cry filled the air 'We shall defy the law'.

"Although India has a tradition of women warriors, this was their first appearance in any modern militant political campaign and I could hardly suppress my excitement at the enormity of the occasion and my own good fortune to be amongst the first. As I attached my name to the pledge to devote myself to my country's freedom battle, my hand shook a little under my tumultuous emotions. It seemed such a stupendous moment in my life, in the life of the women of my country. I felt I was tracing not the letters of my name, but recording a historic event. There was not much time for thought however. The next instant we were filling out, taking the road to the sea, marching with quick steps. Great sky-rending cries or 'Jai' filled the air. Heavy-scented flower garlands almost smothered us. From the balconies and roofs unseen hands showered rose-petals until the road became a carpet of flowers. Often our march was stopped and bright eyed women sprinkled rose water from silver sprays, tipped our palms with sandalwood paste and perfume and blessed us waving lights round our heads and faces for good omen."

The long narrow strip of sand that borders the city like a white ribbon was transformed this morning into another sea – a sea of human faces that swayed and danced and

bobbed about even as did the deep azure waves that rimmed the shore. The city seemed to have disgorged of almost its entire population onto the sands. It was not the struggling batch of seven that was breaking the Salt Law, but hundreds and thousands now filling the water's edge. And still they kept coming, thousands of women amongst them, striding like proud warriors, gracefully balancing their pitchers of maroon-red earth and shimmering brass that scattered a thousand hues as the sun rays struck them. Even as I lit my little fire to boil the salt water, I saw thousands of fires aflame dancing in the wind. The copper pans sizzled in laughter while their bosoms traced the white grains of salt as the heat lapped up the last drop of water.

"The police who had looked on at this advancing avalanche of law-breakers seemed almost stupefied and had to shake themselves up as from a trance and enter on the scene. Some of my Youth League friends joined me to form a separate salt pan of our own and formed a circle around to guard it. The police found it hard to break through the circle so deep was it, that they charged with their batons. The human wall was still unyielding. In the meantime police on horse back charged at the general crowd, but they sat silent and immovable. I could hear the dull thud as the blows fell, faint moans as the wounded struck the ground. Still not a cry, not an angry snarl. Men and women, young and old, were all facing the attack with unbelievable composure, their faces alight with a strange composure.

"We were still guarding our pans. The blows now rained like a blinding shower. They were directed either at the head or the legs, designed in either case to swiftly and effectively fell the people to the ground, and clear a pathway to the pans. I felt sick as I caught a youngster near me with a cracked skull. A rough boot pushed me aside and I came down with my arm right on the burning coals. For a while I seemed to remember nothing. When I

opened my eyes I looked into a pair of kindly eyes. They belonged to a figure in a police uniform. "Can I take you to a hospital? The words sounded genuinely solicitous, 'I have a car here'. I shook my head. 'According to Mahatma Gandhi you should not regard me as an enemy you know' he went on. I could hardly forbear a smile to find this police officer attempting to interpret the Gandhian philosophy to me after perhaps having battered a good few people."

Kamaladevi continued her Civil Disobedience by selling illegal salt until she was arrested, and kept in the police lock up with criminals. She was sentenced to one year simple imprisonment and sent to Yerwads Women's Prison. Sarojini Naidu was already in the prison and they shared the accommodation. Kamaladevi, who had suffered greatly at the hands of the sophisticated eldest member of the Chattopadhyaya clan, is full of admiration for her ability to adjust to the rather spartan conditions of the prison. Sarojini Naidu who always had a suite at the Taj in Bombay had transformed her mundane routine into a pleasurable episode. She had got permission to garden and spent hours pottering around in the garden planting flowers and exotic plants. "I learnt much about plants" says Kamaladevi, who found her to be an amazing and scintillating company.

"She was keenly aware of the small creatures around, the mouse, the lizard, the sparrow and endowed each with a human personality naming each after some political leader, who she believed it resembled. To me the evenings were full of sparkle for she generally would reminisce, recalling anecdotes about people, known or unknown to me, each with a dash of sparkle."

The annual session of the Congress met in Karachi on March 1931. A new member of the Congress were the Red Shirts, the *khudai khidmatgars*, the Pathans of the Northern Western Frontier Province and their leader Abdul Gaffar Khan, popularly known as the Frontier Gandhi.

Abdul Gaffar Khan was greatly attracted by Gandhiji's doctrine of non-violence and was also convinced of its efficacy. Abdul Gaffar Khan not only adopted it himself, but persuaded his fierce Pathan followers to also espouse it. Extraordinary reports were heard of how these habitually violent youth had got so perfectly disciplined as to remain completely peaceful even when attacked violently by armed forces with gunfire. An equally rare occurrence was the firm refusal of the Garhwali jawans to fire on the Pathans because of their sympathy with the rebels. The Frontier Gandhi and his Red Shirts became glowing symbols of the non-violent movement in the public mind.

Kamaladevi was closely associated with the youth movement. It was the youth, who presented through her a resolution of Fundamental Rights to Pandit Nehru, as well as an agenda for economic policy. Later Pandit Nehru presented the final Resolution for Fundamental Rights along with the Economic Policy to the Congress Working Committee. Congress in its earlier discussions on economic issues had not gone beyond the concept of Swadeshi and Khadi, but now proposals such as nationalisation of industries, were seen as revolutionary proposals.

The Congress leadership realized that the Youth movement was gathering momentum and they had in fact precipitated certain decisions. They decided to absorb and thus to some extent control the youth movement.

While Kamaladevi was away in Sri Lanka at the invitation of Youth League, where her "address to the youth led to the first political stir generated in that country and became at the time quite a sensation", the Congress Working Committee decided to take over the Seva Dal under its own organisation. Jawaharlal Nehru would be in charge with Kamaladevi heading the Women's Wing. Dr. Hardikar, who had set up the Seva Dal along with Kamaladevi and had worked to build the youth movement was quite dismayed by this action on the part of the Working Committee and Kamaladevi conveyed this to Mr.

Nehru. However, she took up the work of organising the women's wing and travelled with a young assistant throughout India.

Sardar Patel, whom she had criticised in an open article, was the President of the Congress and she was unsure as to how he would accept her heading the women's section of the youth Seva Dal. He was however very welcoming and in a way challenged her by saying that they needed to train *Sevikas* in hundred thousands, and agreed to her request for a training centre for instructors.

Sophia Somji, who was the first Muslim woman to join the Civil Disobedience Movement when she was 16 and emerged out of the purdah, became Kamaladevi's able assistant. The two of them were able to get an overwhelming response. The age limit was from 16 to 45 years, but older women came in hundreds, abandoning their home and families to work as *Sevikas*.

The training centre of the *Sevikas* at Borivli came in for a great deal of attention not only from the public, but also the authorities. The Orange Brigade as the *Sevikas* were called, as they wore sarees dyed bright orange, as against the black worn by them earlier, were seen going on route marches. The mass drill, the disciplined way in which the camp was run, was seen as a threat. The colonial authorities were already facing the problems from the picketing carried out by women against sale of foreign goods. The successful picketing of the liquor shops had resulted in a loss of revenue to the government. The government banned Seva Dal in 1932 and closed down the Borivli camp. This ban was part of a sweeping act banning all voluntary organisation 'from the National Congress, educational institutions, hospitals, libraries, social welfare bodies.'

Kamaladevi was arrested in Bombay as she returned from Pune. At the lock up she met Seva Dal *Sevikas* and learnt that there had been a pre-dawn raid and rounding up of the *Sevikas*. Kamaladevi when put on trial was asked for her Bombay address she gave the Borivli Seva

Dal address and was told "That does not exist." She was asked where she was arrested and when she replied "On the road". She was told "So you have no residence, you were picked up on the road, you are a vagrant." She was arrested under the Vagrants Act, which defines the person arrested as "without any ostensible means of livelihood and a source of danger to society". She was placed in C-class along with criminals at the Arthur Road Jail.

The other point which was of great discomfort was that they were forbidden underwear. This became an issue amongst the many others that the prisoners petitioned the visitor's committee. The petition was drafted by Kamaladevi, who was punished by being transferred. This was a blessing in disguise for she was transferred to share the prison with Mira Behn. The tall khadi clad Mira Behn, Madeline Slade, the daughter of English admiral, who had become a disciple of Gandhiji. "Mira Behn, her eyes gentle as ever... folded me in her arms. I felt like a boat being docked in a secure cove. I explained, I was there really because I was in disgrace. "What, more disgrace!" she exclaimed and we both laughed."

Kamaladevi enjoyed her company, sharing her food, her books, her simple regime of sprinning and singing Bhajans. Mira Behn in her book, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*⁵ describes this episode vividly. She remarked about Kamaladevi's great beauty even in the prison garb and how much she enjoyed her companionship.

Kamaladevi was transferred to Belgaum women's jail, Hidalgo. "I arranged for my son to see me off at the train. For the first time, I saw him look very forlorn and depressed." Though she goes on to say "No doubt he was one of the thousands of his age going through this trauma". But she must have been haunted by his forlornness, as he

did not have a devoted father or a large extended family to fill in the gap of the mother's love.

The train journey was momentous for all along the route people came in numbers with flowers, fruits, food and gifts for the women prisoners. The cold of Belgaum affected Kamaladevi adversely and her weakness made her prone to infections. She developed jaundice and lay for months without proper treatment or diet, practically at deaths door. Friends managed to get a senior doctor to diagnose her ailment and prescribe a diet and medicine, which led to her recovery.

Kamaladevi recounts "My prolonged sojourn in bed made me realise the complete absence of even an elementary clinic" for the jail inmates. She thus began to collect what she needed for setting up a hospital and succeeded in doing so.

After her release from prison in Belgaum she had a disturbing meeting with Gandhiji. He asked her to give up her political activities for the time being and devote herself to looking after her son whom he had met while visiting Mangalore. While Kamaladevi was on her way to Mangalore she was arrested and spent one year in Vellore. This was perhaps the most trying period of her life. She was practically in solitary confinement. The prison was housed in a barren rocky area and she suffered acutely from the intense heat. Finally after a year she was released from prison and was able to return home to Mangalore. This had been perhaps the longest time that she had not been with her mother and her son. Her divorce had come through in November 1933 and Rama finally was at Scindia School, a residential school in Gwalior.

Jamila Brijbhushan, Kamaladevi's earliest biographer (1975)⁶ had met with Rama and interviewed him and

5. Slade Madeline, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*. Orient Longman, London, 1960.

6. Brij Bhushan Jamila. *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay*, Abhinav Publication, Delhi, 1976.

wrote "A child with parents so involved in such absorbing activities usually feels neglected and develops all sorts of neuroses and frustrations. Not so Rama. He was passed around from his father to his maternal grandmother and then to his father's family, but he was perfectly adjusted and enjoyed being wherever he was. He cannot remember any part of his life when he felt that he suffered from parental neglect or wished that he had been born in more normal life." This appears to be too facile. It is difficult to judge the impact that the erratic behaviour of the father, his temperamental and tempestuous relationships with his wife and other women had on this child. Kamaladevi's complete absorption in her political life must have given the child a great sense of insecurity. In the biography by Kamala Ratnam, which is based entirely on her personal interviews with Kamaladevi, the picture that emerges is of a child torn between two totally different individuals. Harindranath, the charming maverick poet, who led a carefree life and would emerge periodically on the scene and carry off his son disrupting his schooling and the even tenor of his life. He must have been though fascinating for the young child, whom he treated as a playmate rather than a son. Rama according to Kamaladevi always blamed her for the break up of their marriage. It was only when he was a grown up young man and heard from Sitamma, who had looked after Rama and Harindranath, how she had been deserted by Harindranath and left homeless and penniless, that he realized what his mother had to contend with.

When Kamaladevi came out of prison, the Socialist Party as part of the Congress, had already been formed. As Kamaladevi wrote it emerged in the "prison cells with Jaiprakash Narain, Minoo Masani and Yusuf Mehrally". Later Narendra Dev, Purushotham Tricumdas and other intellectuals joined, as also large numbers of young people, who were excited by Marxism and eager for action. The Socialist Party, as a part of the Congress, was accepted by

Jawaharlal Nehru. Kamaladevi writes in her biography that "The Socialist Party declared its ideology as Marxist" while acknowledging that "National Congress was the rightful vehicle of the Indian People's struggle for freedom." All membership of the party necessitated the membership of the Congress Party and the party was called Congress Socialist Party.

The older leaders, the Gandhites, saw the formation of this group as a challenge to Gandhian ideas, even though Gandhiji had accepted the party. Kamaladevi in her monograph on Imperialism and Class Struggle wrote that the senior leadership saw it as "a symbol of revolt against Gandhi and Gandhism,—an indiscriminate importation of assimilative western notions: She wrote "This betrays a lack of historical knowledge." Rejection of socialist approach was claimed by the leadership in order to not confuse the issues. The struggle was against a foreign power and not on issues of class. Kamaladevi rightly pointed out "This shows that a great number of people have not understood the nature of imperialism." She made a strong plea for an economic agenda to fight imperialism.

Kamaladevi joined the party and settled down in Mangalore and began her work in the rural areas by trying to create "a base for sound grass root work" and organise groups for community service. Her links in prison with the women, who had been involved in the Satyagraha movement of Civil Disobedience by refusing to pay taxes and thus losing their lands, home-steads and the very meagre sources of income, had given her a true picture of the conditions of the small farmers and the landless in North Kannada.

According to Kamaladevi, "Labour and peasant unions were unknown in my region." She concentrated on organising the labour unions and a number of them were soon humming throughout the district. She organised a strike of women workers of cashew-nut factories, which created quite a stir in the district and they won their fight. Through

her work in Karnataka, she demonstrated the need for an economic-political agenda to be an important part of the freedom struggle.

In 1936 Jawaharlal Nehru took over as Congress President and he inducted three members of the Socialist Party into the Working Committee. He launched a "Mass Contact" programme, which was launched as a step towards transforming the Congress into a mass organisation. One of the ways of doing this was to hold the annual Congress sessions in the rural areas.

The first Congress session to be organised in the rural area was in Faizpur in Maharashtra. The basic idea which came forward was "land for the tiller" which would be carried out through legislation and persuasion, and a Board was set up to develop a programme that would be realistic and could be taken up by the regions.

The Socialist Group and other activists with whom Kamaladevi was actively involved, began to work towards this objective. The peasants began to be organised into Kisan Sabhas and the first All India Kisan Sabha Conference took place in 1936. 20,000 peasants attended the conference walking many miles to join the rally.

The growing mass movement, which owed much of its momentum to the younger members of the Congress and the Socialist Group, did begin to cause some amount of friction between the old guard and the younger group, specially members of the Socialist Congress Party. Kamaladevi in her memoirs mentions that "the bonafides of Socialists as patriots it seemed to me, were not in question with the Elders at any time, though there may have been personal equations, suspicion and clashes". These did occur and perhaps Kamaladevi was naive to think that there did not exist a great gap in the thinking of the older group of Congressmen and the younger group. Though Gandhiji, in principle, was with the spirit of the reformist concepts, when he declared "Swaraj for me means freedom for the meanest of our people. I am not

interested in freeing India merely from English yoke. I am for freeing it from any yoke". Yet any attempts to organise the workers and the peasants, which was mostly being done by the Socialists led to strained relationships.

In 1938 when Congress opposed the peasant struggle, Jaiprakash Narain, who was one of the three Socialist members of the Congress Working Committee resigned. The struggle, however, continued and this situation was rectified to some extent at the next Congress Party Session at Haripur when a resolution was passed accepting the right of the peasantry to set up Kisan Sabhas.

At the Haripur Congress, Subhas Chandra Bose was elected President of the Congress Party, perhaps because of Pandit Nehru. The Youth Congress members felt that with Subhas Chandra's election a clearer direction would emerge. However, all his attempts to infuse some changes in the movement and a more active participation of the youth was sidelined by the old guard. Kamaladevi, who was the floor-whip of the Socialist Party, found herself deeply involved.

The next Congress, which was organised in Tripura, Subhas Chandra Bose won the election despite strong opposition. Gandhiji's statement that he saw in the election of Subhas Chandra his own defeat, came as a shock to most of the younger group of Congress workers.

There was an open clash between the two giants. Subhas Chandra Bose wanted the Congress to give an ultimatum to the British for "a time bound transfer of power". Gandhiji came out with a statement that "he was always willing for an honourable compromise".

The enmasse resignation of the Congress Working Committee except for Pandit Nehru was an indicator that Gandhiji was manipulating the power behind the scenes. This placed the Socialist Party in a very embarrassing situation. Gandhiji had been suspicious of the Seva Dal's martial like organisational programme and Kamaladevi's involvement in it. He was far more suspicious of Subhas

Chandra, whom he saw as a person, who would deviate the movement from the path of non-violence.

Around this time Kamaladevi went on an election tour with Pandit Jawaharlal and this brought them very close. In her biography she talks of how she observed his ability to function under any circumstances and how well he was organised. He could also be petulant and dramatic, but, "before long however these unpalatable reactions would melt away. A brilliant smile suffusing his whole face would disarm you. He could speak in a soft caressing voice and fill the air with an unexpected touch of gentleness."

There was a great deal of gossip amongst the old Congress members that Kamaladevi was quite infatuated by Pandit Jawaharlal and he with her. The *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, which was strongly supportive of the Congress published a report on 6th January 1937 "There is no foundation for the report published in a Hindi paper and reproduced by several English papers to the effect that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru shortly proposes marrying a socialist graduate girl under Civil Marriage Act." The conservative Congress members were shocked and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya's family were supposed to have also hinted about their being more than mere friendship between them. What shocked many was that, these rumours circulated very soon after Kamala Nehru's death. It is probably because of these rumours that Indira Gandhi was rather withdrawn and cold towards Kamaladevi, and later when she came into power she withdrew a number of Kamaladevi's official involvement with government organisations. Kamaladevi did mention that Indira Gandhi had come across a letter of hers to Mr. Nehru, which could be misinterpreted.⁸

During this period Kamaladevi went to Sri Lanka at the request of Lanka Sama Samaj Party, which was supposed to be a Socialist Party, but later found to be a Trotskyite group. It was here that Kamaladevi, as she mentions in her autobiography, came into contact with Indian labour. There were a large number of Tamil workers brought in by the British to work on their large-scale farms and tea estates. It was also her first encounter with the way the colonizers mistreated Indian labour in the far-flung colonies, who had been brought by them to serve their interests.

Kamaladevi's involvement in the Socialist Party was because she felt deeply the inequality of the peasant and the worker, as opposed to those who had access to land and capital. She felt that any political party needed to address these issues. Her introduction to Marxist thought had led her towards Socialism and she had become deeply involved. The Congress Socialist Party's inauguration had carried the portrait of Karl Marx, the National Flag and the red flag.

Kamaladevi was not an armchair socialist, but took an active part in the Congress Socialist Party's programmes participating in the Kisan Marches in Andhra in 1933. In 1935 she inaugurated the All India Peasants and Workers Conference. It was at her advice that N.G. Ranga, the kisan leader formed the All India Kisan Sabha in 1936, which became a very successful organisation.

It is interesting that though she was anti-communist in her stance she was greatly influenced by Marxist theory. This had begun in England when she and Harindranath had come in contact with the Marxist students and later with Varindranath Chattopadhyaya's influence. During her prison terms she read a great deal of Marxist literature. She was attracted by Marxist thought rather than the Communist politics. The Congress Socialist Party and later the Socialist Party led by Jaiprakash Narain was quite distinct from the Communist Party of India, which saw

7. Akbar M.J. Nehru: *The Making of India* N. Viking, London, 1988.

8. Personal recollections from talks with Kamaladevi.

the Socialist Party as a threat. In fact during the pre-independence and even early post independence era, most bright students or those with social consciousness, were attracted to Marxist thought and many who did not become communists were Royists, followers of M.N. Roy, which was more humanitarian in concept.

Kamaladevi in 1935 was unwell and was recuperating in Mangalore. She however, took charge of the Congress District Committee. The Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, which was quite corrupt felt threatened by her and began a scurrilous campaign against her. They tried to show that she was working against the Gandhian way and had taken a strong Socialist stance. Her anti-princes and anti-zamindari speeches were marked as indicators of being incinidary and influenced by the communists. The Communist Party had been banned in 1934 and many of the workers had gone underground. They took every opportunity to enter some aspect of the Congress Socialist Party to create a base for themselves and the Congress Party was very wary of them. They also questioned her personal life and her association with other party workers.

Kamaladevi and other socialists faced criticism and antagonism and Kamaladevi was kept out of the All India Congress Committee. Margaret Cousin, who watched the situation, commented, "the future of a woman socialist is impossible to forecast despite gifts of highest quality. Her sex weighs the scale against her..... specially when a woman has taken advantage of modern law to secure marital freedom".

Kamaladevi did counter this criticism in her writing on Imperialism and Class Struggle as well as in her Presidential address to the Congress Socialist Party meeting in Meerut in 1936. She puts forward her point of view that the veteran Congress leaders felt that socialism was an import of western ideas and was against Gandhianism. They saw the movement as a struggle against foreign domination and felt that class struggle would confuse the

issues and will give "rise to internecine fights." Kamaladevi felt that this "betrays a lack of historical knowledge" and a lack of understanding of the nature of Imperialism whose allies are "princes, capitalists, middle men and money lenders". She called for a radical change of the system and made an amusing remark. "One may ban the word 'class struggle' as the word 'sex' was tabooed in the 19th century. But from merely abstaining from mentioning a fact, a fact does not cease to exist". She however ends her plea by writing "In conclusion, I wish to impress upon you the necessity of rallying around the Congress and making it the chief organization of anti-imperialist struggle."

Kamaladevi was known for her fearlessness and her sharp tongue. J.N. Sahni, the veteran journalist wrote about her in 1944 that she was a woman of great beauty, which shone out of her simple khadi saree. She spoke boldly, openly and sharply, shocking and astounding everyone.

Kamaladevi's detractors who criticized her political affiliations and her private life, had begun quite early, when she used to address mill workers in the suburbs of Bombay late in the evening. It was unheard of that young women should be out with men. Later her name was associated with a number of colleagues. Dr. Hardikar of Seva Dal, who had inducted her into the movement and G. Venkatachelum, the art critic and connoisseur, who was a close friend of Harindranath and a family friend with whom she had travelled to Sri Lanka. Sarojini Naidu, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya's elder sister had even written to Gandhiji asking him why he was getting involved in Kamaladevi's life and that she was going to get a divorce only to get married to someone else.

Margaret Cousin while writing about Kamaladevi wrote poignantly. "Widowed at 12 for some years she suffered arrested developments and limitations, which child widows experienced". "She has known the ups and downs of social, domestic, maternal, organizational, political, legal

and international experience as few women do in 40 years of her life."⁹

Despite all the problems faced by Kamaladevi she continued her association with the Socialist Party. The Congress Socialist Party met in Meerut in January 1936 before the All India Congress Party to develop a strategy for the forthcoming meeting. The party's strategy was Marxist in content. However, Kamaladevi, Yusuf Meherally, Minoo Masani and a few others were opposed to admitting Communists into the party. Though Kamaladevi chaired the session she allowed Jaiprakash Narayan to overcome the hesitation of the members and did not voice openly her opposition.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru opened the Lucknow Conference with his presidential address he openly supported the approach of the Socialist group. However, nothing really came out of this. The only advantage that the Socialist group was able to get was by the passing of the resolution for amending the "Congress Working Committee's resolution abolishing the system of proportional representation in elections to AICC"¹⁰ (Reena Nanda P81). This Kamaladevi declared was to allow representations of every minority group in the AICC. It was this resolution, which prevented the Socialist Party from being excluded from the various elected bodies of the party.

Pandit Nehru had sprung a surprise by nominating three Socialist Party stalwarts, Jaiprakash Narayan, Achyut Patwardan and Acharya Narendra Dev into the Congress Working Committee. He had however not nominated a woman to the CWC. Jawaharlal Nehru had wanted to include Kamaladevi, but Gandhiji did not give his approval and had wanted that Sarojini Naidu should be nominated, which was opposed by Nehru.

This session of the All India Congress brought out into the open the conflict between the conservative old guards and the youthful revolutionaries. A month after the Congress session, a party of the leading businessmen of Bombay, who were supporters of the Congress came out in protest against socialism being propounded from within the Congress as being a threat "to the sacred values of society, religion, property and even personal liberty". Gandhiji also came into conflict with Pandit Nehru and was able to pressurize him into toning down and in some ways reversing his support of the socialists.

Gandhiji had mixed feelings towards Kamaladevi. Though he appreciated her vitality, her great organizational ability, he however did not appreciate her independent spirit, her challenging manner, her ability to influence and sway the people to her way of thinking by her clear cut thinking, her logical frame of mind and her complete and utter transparency, which was reflected in her impassioned and moving manner of speech, was seen by him as unmanageable.

The Congress Party decided to fight the elections and Kamaladevi, Jaiprakash Narayan joined enthusiastically to campaign for the elections. Kamaladevi accompanied Pandit Nehru on a whirlwind tour of Karnataka in February 1937, when they covered the entire state addressing mammoth meetings of 20000 people to smaller ones in the remote forest villages. There is a very interesting photograph of Nehru and Kamaladevi riding together in a vintage car, which as mentioned earlier, led to rumors that there was more to their open friendship.

The Congress won a majority in six provinces and the Congress old guard took up most of positions of power in the ministries. The Socialist group came forward at the AICC session in Calcutta October 1937 to demand release of political prisoners and repealing of oppressive measures. The right of self-determination of the subjects of princely states became another important issue. Kamaladevi

9. Cousin, Margaret, *Awakening of Asian Womanhood*, Ganesha, Madras 1942.

10 Reena, Nanda. *Ibid.*

made the headlines of *Amrit Bazar Patrika* in Calcutta, for her speech on the repressive rule of the princes. Her resolution on the Mysore State not allowing organizations to function within the state, which had led to arrests and sparked of violence was passed by the Congress. This reversed the policy of non-interference in the states. Kamaladevi had created another episode to antagonize Gandhiji, who took Pandit Nehru to task for allowing the resolution to be voted in. In fact at the next AICC session in 1938 Gandhi made the Congress categorically go back on their acceptance of the resolution by indicating only moral support and sympathy for the people of the State.

However, the occurrence of a violent episode at a Mysore Congress Meeting soon after the Congress Session, which left 30 people dead from a police firing, led to a vindication of Kamaladevi's stand. Gandhiji was again forced to retract his earlier reservations and a Congress Enquiry Committee was set up to go into the whole question.

Kamaladevi believed in action rather than passing of resolutions and her active challenging of the authoritarian attitude of the authorities and the police. Her challenging of the Travancore state made even Gandhiji to change his attitude to the princely states.

Gandhiji published a statement, "The prevention of Kamaladevi from entering Travancore is a first-class blunder. It passes comprehension how Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, himself a foreigner, prohibited the entry of a distinguished Indian lady on the grounds of her being an outsider. It ill becomes the Indian Princes and their advisers to follow the pernicious practices of the English administration."

Kamaladevi was out of active politics for 2 years from summer of 1939 to 1941 when she took her son Rama to the USA. She took this opportunity to study a range of activities, which interested her and also gave her an

opportunity to visit not only Europe and USA, but also Japan and China. She travelled to China when it was under attack. The British prevented her from landing in Hong Kong, but she resisted their machinations and managed to land. Mme Sun Yat Sen looked after her. She met with Genrilismio and Mme. Chang. She travelled to Japan and became quite celebrated and received 100 letters a day from people who only read about her in the newspapers. She saw Noh and Kabuki Theatre, as well as the Puppet Theatre when few people outside of Japan knew about Japan's traditional theatre forms. She gave an image of Japanese women, which was quite different from what was generally projected. She mentioned that of the 5 million industrial workers, 2 million were women and 30% of them were in services. This was quite different from the picture others had presented of the women being subservient and house-bound.

In her heart she was a real adventurer travelling throughout the world and learning at every step. She met all the great leaders of her time and attracted them by her charismatic personality. She met the rulers and also the opposition. She talked of meeting Haile Selassie and having coffee with a rebel Erytherian. She described walking down the large hall to shake hands with the King of Morocco while her Chamba sandal squeaked all the way, to discuss their strategies of resistance and encourage them in their struggle against the French colonolists. She was very supportive of the Tunisian freedom struggle office in exile, which functioned from Delhi.

On her return she found that the Congress Socialist Party was split and they had lost control of a number of trade unions, as well as student organizations to the communists. Jaiprakash Narayan was in prison and he was on fast with 300 other prisoners. Gandhiji's efforts to make him give up his fast was unsuccessful.

Kamaladevi attended the meeting of the All India Women's Conference after a long gap. She proposed that

a camp should be organized for women to train them for leadership and to become better citizens. This idea was accepted enthusiastically and a camp was set up in Gujarat.

Many momentous things were happening. The Japanese were nearly at the door of India. Gandhiji finally decided that it was time for launching a more active fight for freedom. On 8th August 1942 he called up on the British to Quit India. Kamaladevi writes: "For the first time there crept into his voice fire and bitterness as he said to the nation: 'This is open rebellion'. Gandhiji's speech on this occasion is a perfect classic, every word, phrase to be cherished. 'I want freedom immediately, this very night before dawn. Freedom now cannot wait... Let every man and woman live every moment of his or her life hereafter in the consciousness that he or she eats or lives for achieving freedom and will die if need be, to attain that goal. Take a pledge that you will no longer rest till freedom is won, and will be prepared to lay down your lives in the attempt. He who loses his life will gain it, he who will seek to save it shall lose it. Freedom is not for the coward or the faint heart'. He spoke like an inspired messiah.

'Here is a mantra, a short one that I give you; You may imprint it on your heart and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The mantra is: Do or die. We shall either free India or die in the attempt'. He outlined detailed instructions to the various classes of the people, from the princes to the hamlet dwellers. The crux of his call was that each was free, untrammelled to act – each to be his or her own leader. In his usual dramatic manner he said 'From today we are free. Paralyse the government.' This was indeed a magical moment, never to be repeated, only to be cherished as a precious experience".

Kamaladevi slipped out of Bombay and travelled to Bangalore and on 9th August the British moved in to arrest the Congress leaders and even the rank and file. Kamaladevi was able to watch the demonstrations, the hartals, the attack on railway stations. Mr. U.S. Malliah

used to gleefully talk about the hide and seek that they played for over a week with the police, before Kamaladevi was arrested. According to him, it was her love for mangoes, which betrayed her, which Kamaladevi would dismiss as a totally incorrect story.

Kamaladevi was arrested and again sent to Vellore jail where she had suffered so greatly from the intense dry heat during her previous imprisonment. The authorities though putting up a facade of great care being taken of the main leaders in prison treated the women prisoners very cruelly. She was released because of grave ill health in early 1944.

Before she had even recovered from illness she travelled to Bombay to address the All India Women's Conference to which she had been elected as President in 1942, but had not been able to attend any sessions. Even this entry into Bombay was dramatic, as the police had banned her entry. The matter was however resolved and she was able to address the conference.

Kamaladevi however found that a number of communist elements had infiltrated into the All India Women's Conference and were trying to control its activities. It was with relief that she gave up her Presidentship. She began to concentrate on the reorganizing of the Socialist Party.

The flow of events leading to the final independence of the country gathered momentum. The II World War came to an end. The INA Army organized by Subhas Chandra Bose was now in the British hands and the leaders were brought to the Red Fort in Delhi. Though this was supposed to have been kept a secret, the National leaders came to know about it. The news burst like a bombshell. For no army exploits since the 1857 war of independence had electrified the country as the establishment of the Azad Hind Government of Free India and the march of the Azad Hind Fauj – the Indian National Army, as it popularly became known, with its slogan 'Delhi Chalo' and 'Jai Hind!'

New developments, unusual, unorthodox started to move rapidly. Gandhiji and Sardar Patel paid a couple of visits to the prisoners lodged in the Red Fort. Gandhiji, a man of surprises, identified himself with the prisoners, took the matter up with Viceroy Wavell and with the Commander-in-Chief, personally. The Congress Working Committee passed a resolution expressing sympathy with the prisoners. It also set up a powerful committee to organise defense of these prisoners. A whole galaxy of the best legal brains in the country offered their services free of charge. The country showed its sympathy through demonstrations and public meetings. Several women vied with each other to nurture these precious prisoners as 'our proud responsibility' sending them food and gifts. The most spectacular reprisal at this time was the Mutiny of the Indian Navy in Bombay. Kamaladevi said "I was deeply stirred by this as the Chief Naval Officer and some of his close associates were my friends."

The Red Fort trial drew worldwide attention for it injected an element of ethics into prevailing military legalities pushing the latter into the background. The legal world in particular watched the strange course of the trial and ultimate outcome. Kamaladevi was also personally involved when Lakshmi (the nominee of Left during the last Presidential elections, for the post of President of the country) of the Rani Jhansi Brigade reached Delhi. Her mother Ammu Swaminathan was a family friend, a close colleague in the All India Women's Conference, as well as a prison-mate.

During this period, Kamaladevi was involved in rebuilding the Congress Socialist Party while Jaiprakash Narayan and Dr. Lohia were still in prison. She was trying to start a weekly "Jagriti", in Kannada, as a party organ for the Congress Socialist Party. Gandhiji demanded from the British Government the release of Jaiprakash, pointing out that political negotiations could not be carried out when the leaders of the political party were kept

imprisoned. Dr. Lohia and Jaiprakash were finally released. It was shocking to learn of the inhuman torture suffered by them at the Lahore Jail.

As the plans for the independence began to be finalized Pandit Nehru took over from Abdul Kalam Azad as the Congress President. Dr. Keskar the General Secretary was asked by Nehru to request Kamaladevi to join the Congress Working Committee. She refused. Jaiprakash Narayan then pleaded with her to accept as he had refused Pandit Nehru's request and so had Dr. Lohia, who had been asked to be the General Secretary. Kamaladevi accepted. In her autobiography she states "I could not however but feel like the Socialist Party's sacrificial goat offered to stifle Pandit Nehru's discomfiture."

The British proposal to partition the country was not acceptable to Gandhi and yet he made an effort to convince the Congress leadership. The Congress Socialist Party was also against the partition of the country. Gandhiji invited Jaiprakash Narayan to speak to the Congress Working Committee on the issue. Jaiprakash opposed the British proposals. A strong voice cut through the silence, that followed Jaiprakash's plea. "I thought there was only one mad man amidst us. I now find there are two". Kamaladevi does not name the voice, she only says "The reference to Gandhiji was obvious. Deeply stung I gazed, at Gandhi, but his face was impassive." It was on this issue that the Socialist Party split from the Congress.

The British announced the immediate transfer of power. Kamaladevi wrote, "While events moved with incredible speed like a fast moving film, those members of the Working Committee who were not in the government were outside of the arena where lightening decisions were driving the country inexorably like in a Greek tragedy, to its doom. The final plan clinched the matter by simply stating the country would be partitioned and power handed over by the British to the newly formed two dominions. V.P. Menon, Constitutional Adviser to the Viceroy, is said to

have helped draft the final document. Menon would not have drafted this plan with such confidence had he not been reasonably assured by the Viceroy of its finding favour. Nor would the Viceroy have forged ahead with optimism, unless he had sufficient reason that it would work. By the time the plan was formally placed before a small gathering by the Viceroy at his house on 2nd June, 1947, it had obviously been accepted in principle. Present at these obsequies on the Indian side were: Acharya Kripalani, Pandit Nehru, Sardar Patel, with Baldev Singh representing the Sikhs. For the Muslim side were Jinnah, Liaqat Ali, Abdur Nishtar."

Partitioning of a colony was the price extracted by Britain as the price of 'freedom'. This had been a normal pattern of British diplomacy. Everywhere they had left an unending trail of strife, violence, despair, as in Ireland, Palestine, etc. It were as though the entire region was caught in the coils of a vicious ghost, from which it is never able to extricate itself.

"True we swore we did not accept the two nation theory, nevertheless we acted on that palpable fallacy. After having lived together for centuries, we had to pretend that we could not continue to do so. The partition had to provide credibility to a lie. But the lie showed up no matter how elaborately dressed up in various political garbs like the breakaway and formation of Bangladesh later."

"I could not but feel that Gandhiji could have stopped this during the early negotiations. Why did not he? In a kind of mental turmoil I went to Gandhiji." "Why did you let it happen," I almost cried out. 'You had once said we were striking at the very root of our nation. We were sure the country would be with you. Even now if you refuse to accept this monstrous decision, the people will support you. You have only to give the word,' I went on breathlessly for a while. He was silent but troubled. He made a heart-breaking figure, he who had challenged and humbled the

mighty British empire. The arrogant red with which they smeared their world possessions in the maps had begun to fade. Here was the indomitable man who had shaken global foundations, looking beaten. 'It is too late. If it had been ten years earlier...' the voice trailed off for a while as though lost in some thought, then he resumed: 'You see my colleagues came to me when they were still in their prime of life, giving up their bright careers, plunging into an unknown destiny.'

Though appeals to Gandhiji seemed futile, some amongst the Youth Congress and the Socialist Party made desperate attempts. The Socialists stubbornly insisted on active opposition by launching a countrywide opposition. This however was firmly opposed by Gandhiji. The Socialists stressed that partition was not only "a deep emotional atrocity that would lacerate the people for generations, it had no rationale either. The very fact that more Muslims were to stay back in what the Muslim termed 'Hindu India', cut at the very roots of this fantasy. No wonder Gandhiji had intuitively cried out in great agony. 'I see only darkness before me now.' I was pretty sure that if the Khan Brothers had not boycotted the plebiscite on some obscure 'principle' in the North West, it would have stayed with India."

The final endorsement of this agreement was to be by the All India Congress Committee. Gandhiji made a special appeal to the Socialists not to raise any opposition in the Session, for he felt India must stand firmly united at this crucial hour. He had after prolonged discussion with Jaiprakash obtained his concurrence who in turn advised the Socialist Party accordingly. "Though Jaiprakash could often melt me, this time I recoiled at the implication of this message. When the proposition was put to the vote, I could not even reconcile myself to remain neutral. Something within me warned me that if I did not record my objection, my conscience would not reconcile itself to an act, which I felt was fundamentally wrong and if I did not record my

belief I would live with a sense of a heinous guilt. So I raised my hand in opposition. With that I broke my link with this political life. For by now a realisation had been growing in me that this was not my vocation."

In some ways one could say that she was a true Gandhian. In 1947 when the independence of the country was imminent Gandhiji had pleaded that the Congress Party should be transformed from a political party into an organization for peoples movement. For a true democracy to function, power has to come from the people.

Kamaladevi wrote, "The birth of freedom of this *elevated* day did not bring India any such ennobling benediction. On the contrary the country was shaken by a volcanic eruption."

All Delhi seemed ablaze awakening ghostly memories of by gone times of invaders who pillaged and looted this city. Fires raged throughout the city and hands tainted with blood ripped what they could lay their hands on. Streets were strewn with loot, with bodies. Women cried, children screamed. "We rushed where we thought succour could be given. Pandit Nehru was often seen dashing into these turmoils, which provided the greatest moral boost. The very sight of him against the flames with us following, brought out even some of the timid, the wary, the doubters, the unbelievers (some of whom may have been with the evildoers in spirit). I think it was Pandit Nehru's most elevated moment, as also the darkest, when he saw the concept of secularism in tatters, its rising edifice in flames. He fought with desperation. None of us wanted this to be a rear guard action, rather, an onward leap through this very baptism. Alas the evil is still with us. Not just a shattered dream, but a haunting ghost."

Independence began with riots, burning, looting and killing and over 3 million people being uprooted throughout undivided India. These uprooted people moved across the border with nowhere to go. Emergency camps sprang up in many parts of India and the great Kingsway Refugee

Camp on the outskirts of Delhi was like a city of the homeless, who had lost everything even their near and dear ones. A bewildering numbing hopelessness shrouded the inhabitants.

The Prime Ministers of the newly divided country met at Lahore to carryout the evacuation of over 9 million people. While over 2 million had already crossed the newly created borders, which were still undefined. It was the largest movement of people of history. Kamaladevi had realized quite early in 1947 that a situation of uprootedness might arise, but not of such magnitude.

INDEPENDENCE & AFTER

India's independence came at a tremendous price, with India divided into three parts. India represented secularism, while Pakistan became a country created on basis of religion. The British legacy of divide and rule brought this about, but the short sightedness of many senior politicians and the silence of others created this situation, which continues to haunt our politics and our lives. It also betrayed the trust of political allies such as Abdul Gaffar Khan and the Pathan movement for recognition as a distinct entity for which Abdul Gaffar Khan paid dearly by spending his life in prison and in exile. His people, the Pathans, for whom he had started a movement of education, of nurturing their language, of nurturing their creative identity, had been promised a land to call their own after independence, were betrayed by the Congress Party.

Kamaladevi's life in the area of community development, cooperative movement and the development of the non-formal sector as represented in the area of handlooms and handicraft development began with her seeking a way to rebuild the lives of millions, who had lost their families, their home, their lands, their livelihood, their very identity. L.C. Jain, while writing about Kamaladevi wrote that he took Kamaladevi around the refugee camp in New Delhi and instead of "getting a pat on the back" she asked him "All this is very well! But what about their future?" Kamaladevi's own words are very evocative! 'As I watched this unbelievable turmoil descend on us at this long fought for liberation, a spark ignited in the darkness. I

decided to apply myself to the rehabilitation of some of these uprooted families, though the very thought weighed heavily at the sheer magnitude of this colossal task. To me the appropriate answer lay along the cooperative path. I drew up a blueprint for a cooperative body that could plan, generate action and coordinate functions. Kamaladevi who had studied the work of cooperatives in Scandinavian countries was convinced that cooperatives were the only solution to the problems. In her article "Journey through Cooperation", which was published in August 1959 she wrote that Cooperation has today become a political factor. It is regarded as almost an article of faith in the Congress Party. During the colonial period cooperation was seen as acquisitive to the British regime where cooperatives were part of the government and cooperatives were sponsored, administered and run by the government as one of its departments. Cooperation was doled out to the people as one of the many "benefits of British rule", and those non-officials who helped in this task were duly rewarded with titles by the British Raj. However, this situation did throw up personalities who were genuinely devoted to cooperation and through their unstinted service produced beneficial results. The success of the cooperative credit movement achieved was largely due to their work. During the Second World War industrial cooperatives received a spurt, largely because of the acute pressure for increased production.

For most of the freedom fighters, who grew up in opposition to the British regime, cooperation had no special significance except as a means of winning the favour of the rulers. Kamaladevi's visit to Scandinavia and seeing cooperation at work in Denmark, Sweden, Norway that she realized the potentialities of cooperation. She says: "It was not just an economic lever for providing a means of livelihood or raising the income, but rather as a social factor, and a way of life. It had been evolved out of dreams and aspirations of idealists. The strategic and heroic role of

the cooperatives in war torn China under very grim conditions further enriched my own concept of cooperation".

After the 1942 movement, cooperation came to have a more important place in the socio-political programmes of younger groups like the Socialists. Cooperatives seemed to point the way to many problems that were besetting the country and they were getting endowed with a new idealism, stripped of the skepticism of the British days. "The stage was thus propitiously set for a new orientated cooperative movement when August 1947 dawned. In a way an edge was provided to this by the Partition upheaval and the heavy uprooting of million, and its compelling urgency."

"It was against this background that the Indian Cooperative Union was born. A small band of idealists who had "talked" of cooperation as the ideal middle path, saw a great opportunity for putting these dreams into practice and giving them some tangible shape. Thus while the problem of providing elementary relief to the refugees from Pakistan weighed on the country like some colossus and the thought of rehabilitation at the moment almost unrelated, yet some did give weight to it and cooperation seemed to point the way. To these families torn away from their age old environments, with not the remotest hope of going back, who had to remake their home in strange surroundings, find new vocations, adjust themselves to unaccustomed things, cooperation had everything to offer. Whatever resources they could muster could be pooled. They had no properties or possessions to part with or share, only their hopes, struggles and labour. They could accept this corporate life with greater ease and less inhibitions. But the refugees had no organization with the necessary imagination or strength, nor could they in their dark despair idealise a rosy future or a new way of life. An organisation of this quality and nature was called for. Thus was the Indian Cooperative Union born, like a spark of

light at the darkest hour on our horizon".

She saw the Indian Cooperative Union (ICU) as an organization that could take up the task of trying out the experiment of cooperation between diverse people who had lost their homes, their livelihood, their way of life to come together and rebuild their lives. With a few valunteers she created a master plan for cooperation, for building a township, cooperative farming, generating income. It was a fairly ambitious plan. She wrote: "I was at a loss as to whom to consult, whose aid to seek. Under this frightful emergency all concentration was on immediate relief. Long term plans seemed unreal. My thoughts flew to Gandhiji. So I took the blueprint to him. He was one person I was confident would take it seriously. And he did, even as he glanced over it. I explained I had already initiated a few preliminary tests. I had visited some of the refugees and several of them were ready to form cooperatives if they got land. I asked Gandhiji that, If I would get the organising body registered as the **Indian Cooperative Union**, would he in the meantime secure land for them? He kept my draft with him to enlist supporters. I was soon called by him. I saw his old alert self again. He had liked the project, felt it would work. In his enthusiasm he had commended it to Pandit Nehru. But the latter, however characterised it as Utopian, one of the impractical new fangled plans the socialists would think up—and with this crisp comment summarily dismissed it".

Gandhiji did not seem too concerned by this response and he said, "I shall help and identify myself with the venture. But on one condition. You and the cooperative farmers rely on your own earnest labour, and not lean on the administration. For, as you know, the first principle of cooperation is self-reliance". I readily concurred, but reminded him that we would have to get some land, for all evacuee land was in government possession. Thinking for a while he said he would approach Govind Vallabh Pant. "You go ahead with your promotional body", he ended on

a most optimistic tone. That was Gandhiji. In this dark hour of his agony, caught in the cruelest turmoil of his life, he had the time to spare for an ordinary worker, a novice, and found time to study my fumbling project paper and try to help me. Tears trembled in my eyes...."

"The framework of the Indian Cooperative Union (ICU) was unacceptable to the Delhi State Cooperative Department, as it had been independently set up. An independent cooperative body was an anachronism and a challenge to their established authority. The usual procedure was for the department to sponsor a cooperative, appoint its office bearers, give them loans, make their budget, in short, run the cooperative departmentally".

Gandhiji heaved a heavy despondent sigh when Kamaladevi reported this to him. In low agonized voice he told her, 'I am glad you thought of trying to rebuild torn lives. Because of the decisions we made, thousands of poor innocent people have to bear hardships...' Despite what historians may say today Kamaladevi came to realize how much of the responsibility for the agonizing partition of the country he took upon himself and he felt that he had to carry the burden of the responsibility of what had happened.

Despite the difficulties created by the Delhi State Cooperative Department Kamaladevi was able to register the ICU and began work on the Agricultural Cooperative. "The Government's Relief and Rehabilitation Secretariat was housed in an over-aged building known as the P-Block. When you entered you were seized with grave doubts as to whether you had not strayed into the wrong place for you had to pick your way through stores, piled up goods, lumber of all sorts. In this Block was the usual reception. It was a replica of a third class railway waiting room". She doubted whether anything would really happen. She says: "More days, weeks passed by, while I hung around on empty promises. Finally, I decided to clinch it by direct action. I located an area in Chhattarpur, 12 miles

from Delhi. I informed the concerned authority that if in the next three days the allotment was not made, I would simply take the refugees and settle them there. I engaged trucks, got them to select the necessary implements and whatever else they needed. The evening before the adventure, I got the allotment letter. Along with that she got the duty to allot lands with the help of an assistant, Ramachandra Rao, who had been an inmate in one of the Gandhian Ashrams. He was sharp and shrewd, as a counterpoise to her bubbling enthusiasm. They both sat day after day, scrutinizing the refugees with their applications. Persuading those, who came in groups of the advantages of working in a group. Those who agreed were collected to work together in the Cooperative Union. Soon there were about half a dozen cooperative farms at work. Kamaladevi with a group of people assisted the Agriculture Cooperatives and continued her association with the Refugee Camps.

She was one day told of a tent town that had come up 14 miles away from the main camp and that they needed help urgently. When they reached the tented camp, many of the tents had been blown off in the raging storms. Many tents were in tatters and hundreds of families huddled together, covered with dust and sand. "It was open sandy land. It was a heart-rending sight. They were from the North West Frontier, the hardy Pathans. Kamaladevi approached the President of India, Rajendra Prasad, and unfolded to him a plan she had devised, to give them a township of their own, persuade them to build it themselves cooperatively, and create a sense of belonging. The President set up a special board, which he himself headed and the plan was launched".

Thus, the plan for Faridabad came up and the people, who had never turned a sod, nor laboured with their hands or shouldered a burden, began to break stones, make bricks, saw wood. These courageous people were encouraged, enthused and supported by Kamaladevi with

her group of helpers, who formed the Indian Cooperative Union. They were a handful of idealists with no ready resources and equally no earlier experience. They were motivated by the desire to help and a new ideal of self-help was put to work and this finally resulted in a whole new city to spring up in an incredibly short time... 25000 Pathans from the North West Frontier Province coming from divergent background worked together to create their own township. "The social significance lay in the fact that traders, moneylenders, producers, shopkeepers had turned manufacturers, servicemen". They built and operated their own power house, ran their own transport service, schools, health centres, shops, bazaar and a whole host of things.

The growing city was divided into a number of sectors, each to hold a self-contained community with full amenities. A properly equipped hospital was constructed, called after Badsha Khan; a body to promote and conduct sports, games and recreational activities. Faridabad had its own railway station and went on the map. It was then seen as a model of community development.

Pandit Nehru had come to hear of the Cooperative Union and its experimental farm at Chhattarpur and wished to see it. He was pleased to see the work being carried and was full of praise. Kamaladevi said, "I did not spoil the day by reminding him all this was not Utopian as he had once commented."

Kamaladevi realized that it was necessary to start some income generating activities amongst the inmates of the camp and asked the volunteers to carry out a survey of what skills were available amongst the men and women in the camps. Based on the available skills they began craft activities in the camp itself. Soon they needed an outlet for their production and this led to the starting of a Refugee Handicrafts shop in Connaught Place, which laid the seeds for the later setting up of the Central Cottage Industries Emporium.

Her involvement in the cooperative movement made her feel that the craftspersons who lived under difficult circumstances being exploited by the business community, money lenders and middle men could only be benefited if they could organise themselves into cooperatives. She thus organised an industrial Arts and Crafts Exhibition with craftsmen from all over India. The largest number were from Kashmir and she invited Sheikh Abdulla to inaugurate the exhibition.

THE HANDICRAFTS MOVEMENT

Much has been written about the Indian handicraft scene and continues to be written. The recent celebration of the Golden Jubilee of Handicrafts Resurgence by Development Commissioner of Handicraft's office focused attention on the situation of craftspersons. Now the Centenary Celebration of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay being celebrated by the Crafts Council of India and its regional organization is focusing attention on the crafts once again for it was Kamaladevi, who developed the programme and brought the craftspersons into the public eye.

Even today we have to ask the question "Who are the craftspersons?" When we use the word artisan in the English context, we mean a mechanic, a skilled worker and when we apply it to craftsmen, we think of craftspersons involved in a mindless mechanical activity. That is perhaps not what we really mean. It is the confusion in using the word in the way that it is used in French. In French 'artisans' means crafts and we are confusing the issue by using the word, artisan for craftspersons. A craftsperson is one, who is skilled in a craft technique and though he may produce a number of similar objects, each one however expresses the maker's creativity. He also besides creates a number of other objects, which are a total expression of his or her creative self. Take the case of a potter. He may stand at his wheel and produce a thousand clay lamps or *kullars*, cups, but he is also able to create wondrous forms and shapes, gods & goddesses, animals and birds for worship and to delight our hearts.

There are crafts made by men and women for their own use with the surplus being sold locally, as is the case in crafts, which use local materials such as palm leaf, papier machie, embroidery and a host of others even the loin loom weaving. There are traditional craftsmen, who supply the needs of local industry and households such as the jogis the itinerant bamboo workers, the stone carvers, the *gaudolia lohars*, the itinerant iron smiths, connected with making and repairing of agriculture implements, household utensils and many more that never get counted in the census or be a part of the government programmes.

In 1952's the government set up the All India Handloom and Handicraft Board with a government official at its head. Pandit Nehru however requested Kamaladevi to head the Statutory Board, which began functioning in November 1952 with Kamaladevi as its Chairperson.

Kamaladevi's interest in the area of crafts was nurtured in her childhood when she had participated with the entire household in decorating the house by plaiting the fresh palmyra leaves into shapes and forms. In watching the creation of objects for the innumerable rituals, which were linked with the diurnal rhythms. She had seen the jewellers working in her home, who brought their simple tools to encrust the jewellery with diamonds and precious stones under the watchful eyes of the women of the house.

The act of creation had always fascinated her and she was aware that these creative people were the most impoverished and underprivileged. Gandhiji's espousal of the cause of the indigo workers of Champaran had drawn her to the freedom movement, as she felt that here real issues relating to the people were being addressed. She was aware that Gandhiji's interest in swadeshi was multifaceted. It was not only a way of creating an economic policy to reach millions of rural persons who pursued cottage industries as a means of employment and subsidiary income; or a way of creating a platform for uniting the

small manufacturers of the non-formal sector; but it had a deeper meaning, which was expressive of the cultural ethos of a people.

Gandhiji's use of khadi was more than a political symbol of unification of a divergent people. He not only cut across caste, class and creed, but conveyed a number of messages. By making spinning, an essential part of the discipline of the Congress worker, he brought in a respect for working with the hands. He inculcated a respect for the act of creation and an understanding of the repetitive act of spinning as a form of meditation, a time for concentration and for inner quietitude. In the midst of the turmoil of fight for freedom, hundreds of leaders, common people, who believed in the Mahatma's approach to the freedom struggle, sat quietly spinning everyday. The simple Gandhi cap, which he devised became a symbol of unification of a people who shed their separate identities by wearing the cap.

Khadi and the Gandhi cap was the symbol and the creed of the freedom movement. He also saw crafts as a form of creative expression, which would work to create a balanced personality, which was reflected in his call for giving importance to crafts in our educational system. His insistence on *Small is Beautiful* as a creed that he began in the 20s, whereas Schumaker created an awareness of it only in the 70's, was a holistic approach to his socio-economic, political and cultural policy. Kamaladevi in her book *"Inner Recesses Outer Spaces - Memoirs"* writes "It was only after I met Gandhiji that I came to understand the deep relationship of handicrafts with our daily life". How enormously beneficial it was for "us to live with them and make them an integral part of our everyday existence" to quote him: "The pleasurable sensation I enjoyed by the mere feel of the object and the tender sensitivity it breathed into the air, were experiences I valued and I still cherish like harmonious tones of music that echo in one's being even after the sound itself has died away, and the

sensations that tingle in one's veins at the sight of mingling colours".

Kamaladevi describes that, on one of her earliest visits to Gandhiji, she found him in deep conversation with Dr. James Cousins, the noted Irish poet and theosophist. A few handicraft objects were lying before them and Gandhiji expounded "what was then considered one of his weird philosophies but now proved scientifically", the need to use our hands, which were one of our chief mediums for creative expression and also had therapeutic and meditative qualities. He talked of the imperative need to preserve this heritage that enriched every aspect of our way of life. She goes on to quote from Gandhi "Association is the essence of relationship which endears articles of everyday use to the user. This endearment finds a way of enhancing the aesthetic values in these articles, just as we love to dress up our loved ones, so we love to embellish our homes. Here, the Craftsman employs his ingenuity through creative imagination. We are mostly carried away by a finished product, may be excited by watching the process, but remain unmindful of the deep chords within us that are stimulated when we create something with our own hands. Therefore, in the Indian tradition, craftsmanship does not mean making novel and exotic articles to please one's fancy, but endowing everything we use in our daily life with beauty. Therefore, nothing is created without a purpose".

Gandhiji was deeply committed to the use of crafts in Basic Education. Unfortunately, we have only given lip service to this concept and the introduction of crafts in Basic education remained, a part of tokenism in which we in India specialize and that too was later withdrawn.

Kamaladevi was a true disciple of Gandhiji and she added another dimension to it. She saw crafts not in isolation, but as a part of the rich fabric of our life involving all the creative expressions of a people. They were a part of the rhythm of life involving creativity at all levels. For

her it became her entire life and she worked selflessly for the cause of the crafts, for performing arts and for nurturing the creative spirit of the people. She wrote with great sensitivity of how she saw crafts in UNESCO's publication *The Arts and Man* (Paris, 1969). "Craft has always been a basic activity in human society, in fact it is considered more cohesive and permeating in human relationships than even language, for it can penetrate many barriers to communication. Particularly has this been true of the older societies such as those in Asia, South and Central America, Africa and countries like Greece or Spain, where certain aspects of the ancient handed-down cultures still continue to produce powerful impressions that almost seem ageless.

"The growth of crafts in society was the sign of the cultivation of sensitivity and the stirring and mellowing of humanism. It stood for man's endeavour to bring elegance and grace into an otherwise harsh and drab human existence. In fact, man's elevation from the gross animal existence is marked by his yearning for something beyond the satisfaction of mere creature comforts and needs, which found natural expression in crafts. No aspect of life was too insignificant or humble to lay claim to beauty or acquire sanctity as a symbol of good omen. The use of special articles for special occasions in the way of clothes, jewels, vessels, etc., all of which had to have a certain quality to ensure a high standard even in daily life and use, meant a continuous outflow of creativeness, a sustained spirit of animation and freshness dispelling staleness and monotony.

We find, for instance, that in many countries to give solemnity to certain things a convention was established by which they were made into ceremonials. The tea ceremony of Japan is a good example. It requires a special pavilion offering seclusion from the bustle of everyday life, in its own surroundings, and the use of its own vessels or cups, involving the manufacture of special pottery. Though the ideals sought were relaxation, contemplation of beauty

and communion with nature, these alone were not regarded as giving complete fulfillment unless they were made part of one's intimate daily life, hence the introduction of the tea ceremony. Where the earth is dry and burns under voluptuous rays as in deserts, where life is grim and severe and resources poor, the people seem to compensate with riotous colour and exuberant forms, creating a sense of luxuriance and plenitude through their crafts. There is a breathless eagerness created in the atmosphere, rapturous vivaciousness in the articles that are used, a springtime dazzle in garments and even in the harness and trappings of domestic animals".

In one of her speeches she also examined its socio-economic and political role. In a speech she gave in 1962 she said, "The continued existence of cottage industries meant to an appreciable extent the decentralization of social and economic power and the creation of an institutional plurality which effectively stood between the ordinary citizen and a powerful state. Besides providing ample employment to the rural folk, the cottage industries played an important role in the process of decentralization of economic power on the rural level. The ability of the village to fulfill its own manufacturing needs gave it a remarkable social cohesion, which could not be loosened in any significant way by even the most devastating war. History may have happened in Pataliputra, Kannauj, Delhi or Agra, but it was always *against* the backdrop of stability in village life. The cottage industries almost acted as a defensive economic wall against the ravages of time and man. And these industries were by no means primitive. Within their warp and woof they displayed fine skill and varied techniques developed through generations of dignified toil. Through the centuries until the calculated destruction of the indigenous industries in British times, the products of India were famed in all the markets of the world. These brought wealth to the country, but it seldom concentrated in a few layers of society. It is true that the royalty

displayed fabulous riches, but poverty was not so great and absolute as in more recent times. If the cottage industries taught the village independence in its ordinary life from the exactions of the capital, they also taught the people in the village interdependence.

Handicrafts is rightly described as the craft of the people. In India it is not an industry, as the word is commonly understood; for the produce is also a creation symbolizing the inner desire and fulfilment of the community."

Kamaladevi had involved herself in crafts even in the midst of her hectic political life and inter-related it with her political activities. The All India Congress Sessions in the 30s had exhibitions of crafts and weavers, potters, came from many parts to demonstrate their skills. The great-grandfather of the Patola weaver, Shilp Guru Vinayak of Patan participated in the Haripur Exhibition and remembered Kamaladevi, as someone who had looked after him, as he welcomed her when she visited Patan in the late 50s, as Chairman of the All India Handicrafts Board. The All India Women's Conference made it mandatory for their Branches to carry out work in crafts involving women. Every National Conference had an exhibition of their craft activities. People knew of her deep interest in handicrafts, her dynamism and her ability in organising new activities, which had no precedents. It was this that made the Prime Minister request her to take up the work of craft development.

She launched the programme for handicrafts and handloom development in 1952 at the behest of Jawaharlal Nehru. The Cottage Industries Board had been set up soon after Independence, as a Government organisation, where noting and creating files and paperwork was the main activity. Under the direct intervention of the Prime Minister this government department was transformed into All India Handicrafts & Handloom Board. The bifurcation of Handloom and Handicrafts in two separate

Boards occurred later. This was a challenging task for there were no previous experience on which to build the work. It meant the creation of a new economic order for a newly independent country, which would nurture and support the existing structures and skills. The economic planners of the Planning Commission, who had been trained in the economic policy applicable to industrialized societies, looked at the cottage industry sector with the perceptions of the European economists, as a non-productive welfare activity, while the Marxists saw it as exploitation of labour. To build an economic policy, which saw the craft sector as an important part of Development Economics and to convince the Planning Commission, to give it the importance it needed, was an uphill task. However, the planners did accept the need for a dual economy, which would support Large and Medium Industry, as well as the Small Scale and the Cottage Industry Sector.

Kamaladevi was able to get the advice and support of well-known economists, Prof. P. N. Dhar and Dr. Raj Krishna, to develop the approach needed to evolve a Development Programme for Handicrafts. She had the able assistance of a dynamic young Gandhian, Shri L. C. Jain, whom she appointed as Member Secretary of the All India Handicrafts Board. Mrs. Kitty Shiva Rao was the Vice President and Smt. Pupul Jayakar an active member of the Board. Jayakar was later appointed by Shri Morarji Desai to head the Handloom Board.

The All India Handicrafts Board was a statutory Board with a government department to execute the decisions and was headed by Shri K.L. Nanjappa with only five people to assist him. These handful of people began the task of mapping out the craft centres and trying to reach out to them. Kamaladevi was a woman of foresight, of action and she created a multi-pronged programme. A team of economists, marketing experts and researchers carried out a rapid Market Survey of Crafts in well-known urban centres in the different regions. The first report on

handicrafts was the Marketing Survey of Handicrafts which was released in 1954. A conference was organised to discuss the immediate needs of the sector. Marketing of the crafts, and the need to develop the traditional crafts to meet the changing needs of the consumers, as well as opening up other outlets other than the local markets were seen as the immediate requirements. A plan of work based on the findings of the survey was developed.

The Central Cottage Industries Emporium was actually started in 1948 by the Central Ministry of Industry and Commerce as a mark of the government's earnest effort to popularize and market handicrafts, because of Gandhiji's love and concern for them. To him they were part of our great heritage, and what Gandhiji advocated still meant something to the rulers of the time. But running a shop departmentally meant continued heavy losses, varying between 40 to 60 thousand rupees a year. The entire sales for the first two years were around a mere two lakhs of rupees. Pandit Nehru, exasperated by the dismal record, advised the ministry concerned to negotiate with the Indian Cooperation Union which was engaged in refugee rehabilitation and had been successfully running the modest Refugee Handicrafts store for selling their products. He in fact said "No ministry can run such a shop. Ask the Refugee Crafts—nay, persuade it to take over the Emporium", he advised the Ministry. Thus the present Central Cottage Industries Emporium took shape. Of course the Union was only empowered to run the shop, but could claim no ownership.

In October 1952, the Emporium was handed over to the Indian Cooperative Union but only for the purpose of running it, the ownership lying with the government which remained the basic weakness of the institution. The Emporium did not merely change hands, it had to be transformed. It was to function not only as a marketing organisation, but also as an important part of the development of handicrafts and handloom industry, where it had

a definite role to fulfil. Clear cut policies were formulated and positive guidelines laid down in which the interest of the small manufacturers, the craftsmen who worked in their homesteads with limited resources needed to be helped. Those who were now to shape the structure of this new organisation had to build a strong relationship with the creators and inspire them to be a part of the movement of the national cultural renaissance.

With a cooperative body to manage it, the institution became the collective responsibility of the entire staff from those who decided the policies to those who maintained the place; through their membership they had an equal voice in decision making. The Ministry was asked to set up an Advisory Board to involve public leaders in its functioning. Training courses were started for the working cadres, the sales personnel, as well as for a team of buyers. They were made to familiarize themselves with the history of crafts, production processes, special characteristics of different craft traditions. How could they get the type of products which could meet the requirements and changing tastes of the consumer. The buyers went into the remotest parts of the country, sought out craftsmen, sat with them guiding them in the needed reorientation of traditional objects to adapt them to modern use and bring them into the current stream. Every single item thus got individual attention, imaginative and creative handling. The CCI as it was known did become a centre of popular focus. As Pandit Nehru would say, it was a "modern monument of Delhi like the Qutub of the old era and a must for visitors."

The persons involved with the Refugee handicrafts shop, Kity Shivarao, Teeji Vir Singh along with Prem Berry and others became involved in the reorganisation of the moribund government run Cottage Industries showroom.

The All India Handicrafts Board under the dynamic Chairmanship of Kamaladevi worked closely with the CCI and Kamaladevi was closely linked with the formation of

the policies. The Board developed its supportive programmes for the crafts sector. The economic advisors proposed prioritization of the most important issues. The priority need was surveys of some of the main handicrafts industries, to assess employment levels and get a detailed picture of the status of the craft sector. This required a planning and research division. Kamaladevi was aware that unless we could give specific figures of employment it would be very difficult to get the planners to sanction funds for the development programmes. She also felt that these craft surveys would also highlight the areas in which the different craft centres needed assistance.

A priority area was the assessment of the technological and design inputs needed to upgrade the products, so that the crafts could be introduced into the market and meet the changing consumer requirements. Kamaladevi did not have the rigid approach of the Gandhians working on Khadi who did not want any improvement of technology. She said "Nor is craft divorced from a degree of mechanism, because from earliest times man started evolving tools as an extension of his being and did not rest content with the unaided skill of his physique."

She emphasized the need to introduce research on technological development and encouraged the use of power to increase productivity and reduce the pressures on the craftsmen. She began work on introducing design development to meet the needs of the changing way of life. For this purpose Regional Design Centres were set up in Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore and Calcutta. She looked for artists, who had a deep sympathy and involvement with craft traditions. The well-known sculptor S.L. Prashar headed the Design Centres at Mumbai. S.L. Prashar, who had been Principal at the Mayo College of Arts in Lahore and had headed the Art School at Simla and later at Chandigarh had been closely involved with the designing of creative crafts and had close association with some of the leading masters. Being a sculptor he had worked with

different materials and techniques and Kamaladevi felt that his sensitivity to form would be ideal for the craft field. Shri P. N. Mago, a student of Mr. Prashar and a well-known painter, headed the Design Centre at New Delhi at the Okhla Industrial Estate. Shri Haldar, another well-known artist, headed the Design Centre at Bangalore. While Shubho Tagore, an artist with a rich collection of folk art, Baluchar textiles and a deep involvement in the traditions of Bengal, began to work in Calcutta. The Regional Design Centre in Calcutta however took off only when Prabhas Sen took over as the Director and grew into an important centre, which nurtured the craft skills of the area.

It became necessary to carry these designs to the craftspersons and they began a new experiment of Marketing Clinics in different regions. The concept of the Marketing Clinic was that of a medical clinic. Craftsmen and cooperatives brought their crafts and a group of designers, production specialists and field workers, listened to the problems faced by the craftsmen. They examined the products and tried to identify the needs of the craft centres. Was it the raw material, design, techniques, which needed to be upgraded? Was the pricing a problem? If so, why? What did the craftsman earn? What were the linkages and how did they function? This was a novel way of approaching the problem, which created closer links between the designers, marketing outlets and the craftspersons.

This led to the setting up of other areas of activity, quality control, experiments on improving the tools and equipment, so as to create labour and time saving devices and also use of new materials, which had been developed and were only available to the industrial sector.

Kamaladevi also visited each and every important craft centre. She personally located unknown craft centres and developed special productions to be exhibited at the CCIE. For the Emporium was set up to create not only a

market outlet, but to show-case the finest products of handicrafts and introduce new products from all over India. Many objects developed by Kamaladevi during her field visits to the remote crafts centres, which could not be covered by the Regional Design Centres were exhibited to attract the newly emerging Indian clientele. The Regional Design Centre also carried out the market study of their designs through the CCI.

The Indian Cooperative Union, which started the Central Cottage Industries Emporium 50 years ago and registered it as an Association also had to build their activity, so as to create a multi-level departmental store of Handicrafts, which transformed the tumble down Janpath Barracks into Indian's pride. Teeji Vir Singh and Mrs. Prem Berry with their experience of marketing of Refugee Handicrafts and with the guidance of Kitty Shiva Rao and Mrs. B.K. Nehru and support of dynamic and talented Seena Kaul were responsible for building it up. The CCIA as it came to be known was the showroom of the best of Handicrafts with its buyers such as Gulshan Nanda, Nakra sisters and many others travelling the length and breadth of the country, searching for crafts and craftsmen to create new products and refurbish the old. What is taken for granted today, was built up by sheer hard work and the grit of these pioneers inspired by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya's example, who visited each and every village, walking, wading through rivers and riding thousands of kilometers into the interior of the country in a jeep, reaching villages, which had yet to be linked by road and rail. She was ably assisted by a number of people, who worked closely with her, Shyamer Babu, K. Chakraborty Mohana Ayyangar and many others.

For administrative purposes and in some cases political reasons the large Cottage Industry Sector was divided into different organisation. There was the Khadi and Village Industries Organisation run by the Gandhians, who were very sensitive to retaining what they thought was the

Gandhian approach. The Handicrafts and Handloom Board was bifurcated and the Handloom sector, which was the largest, was meant to look after the interest of the large number of weavers, who produced for the local markets. They were to develop supportive and protective policies for the handloom sector and the competition it faced from the industrial sector. The finer quality of weaving with artistic contents was the responsibility of the AIHB. There was the Silk Board, the Coir Board, which were specialized organisations to look after their sector. Kamaladevi never differentiated between the organisations and when she travelled she looked at each and every form of activity involving the people and had a holistic picture of what was needed for their development. Kamaladevi had felt that the separation of the different areas within the cottage industries, which was done at the initial stage as a matter of expediency and was carried out because of administrative reasons. In the early stage when so little was known of this enormous area of activity, in terms of areas to be covered, regional differences, as well as the involvement of millions of crafts families, in this sector, which was the largest employer after agriculture, it may have been necessary to carry out these divisions. However, with the growth of knowledge the sector had to be looked at in its entirety. Once the sector was developed the policies governing the sector as a whole needed to be re-examined and the different institutions appropriateness evaluated. Unfortunately this was never done, the bureaucratic structures and institutions have continued and in fact have multiplied. Many have outlived their usefulness and they have continued, without evaluation of their work or assessing their utility.

It was also imperative to educate the consumers and change the tastes of the people who had been alienated from the Indian aesthetics and craft expressions. For this a series of exhibitions of different crafts were organised. Mrs. Swantrata Prakash, who had joined the AIHB in the late

50s as a Display Artist was sent for training to USA along with Teeji Vir Singh of the CCIA and Mrs. Bijur also of the AIHB. Mrs. Prakash honed her skills and put up attractive exhibitions, which brought out the beauty of the crafts. Every year one state was selected for developing their crafts and Kamaladevi toured the state with the staff of All India Handicrafts Board, designers and the staff of the State Government. The Chief Ministers were invited to open the exhibition and many of them were greatly impressed and even amazed by the wide range of their own crafts, and the possibility of finding not only an all India market, but also a market abroad, thus giving employment to a large number of the poorest section of people in their states. This convinced them to strengthen the craft organisation in the state, set up advisory boards, design centres and even State Emporiums. This also created a sense of urgency to develop the products of the area and created a sense of pride in the creative expression of their state amongst the government officials and the craftsmen.

This work carried out by Kamaladevi when she travelled the length and breadth of the country locating the craft centres and assessing their needs was a hands on approach and was needed as handicrafts were spread throughout the country and had been restricted to answer the needs of the local people. Products which were made for a known clientele did not have a regular demand nor a retail outlet. Mostly objects were custom made. People ordered their personal needs with the weavers, with the printers, with the jewellers, with the shoemaker. Families ordered their furniture for occasions, they ordered their household needs. There were no large stores where people could buy whatever they required for maintaining their homes and work places. Also products of one area were not known in the other areas, except in the case of Varanasi for brocades and silks, or Moradabad brass or the work of the Sthapathis and Sompuras, the temple builders.

It was this pioneering work that built the base of the

craft organisation. It is taken for granted today that we can walk into a shop and buy printed silk and cotton sarees or yardage for our homes or even table linen. Till the 60's this did not exist. People bought the material went to the printer and from a sampler selected the patterns, the colours and they were printed for them. The large printing centres of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra, Bengal, Tamilnadu, which had supplied the world with printed textiles from pre-historic times and had been closely linked with the international trade in spices, as the producers of the spices would only exchange the spices for Indian printed cottons. This attracted buyers from throughout the world from Buddhist times. They lost their market after World War I and had also lost their local market to the mill prints and were producing printed cloth only for local peasantry. A beginning was made in Rajasthan with the help of Craft School at Jaipur, which was directed by a trained designer Surjit Sahay. Gayatri Devi, the Maharani of Jaipur, was persuaded by Kamaladevi to take an interest in the craft traditions and she made old samples of printed fabrics for reproduction. The refined printed textiles produced in the royal Karkhanas of Jaipur were thus revived and introduced into Sanganer. Similar work was done in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra and within a short time a rich vibrant printing industry with an urban and export market emerged.

Later Gayatri Devi made a building available for running a craft school under the famous painter and muralist, Shri Kirpal Singh Shekhawat, a student and teacher of Shantiniketan, who had also studied and worked in Japan for many years. This is only one example. It can be multiplied many fold. The brass industry of Jaipur, Moradabad and Jagadiri were transformed. Bellmetal industry of Bengal, Assam, Orissa and Kerala, which catered only to local markets were assisted. The Bronze Casting of Swami-malaya had deteriorated, a Bronze Casting Centre with master Sthapatis brought back the purity of form. Wood

carving of UP, Punjab, Rajasthan, Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Kerala, which were copying European patterns in furniture and the calendar pictures in their carvings, were given help to develop new areas of production. Stone inlay of Agra, which had descendents of those, who had worked on the Taj were helped and the craft was revived. The government of Tamil Nadu was persuaded to set up the Mahabalipuram School of Sthapatis, which revived the tradition of Sthapatis and revived the ancient science of Vastu. The master stone carvers of Orissa and many other centres were helped to find a market for their skillful renderings.

Kamaladevi inducted anyone who showed an interest in crafts into working for crafts. Liela Shiveshwar, the wife of the Chief Commissioner in Varanasi, who was interested in reviving local skills in wood furniture, was given funds for developing a range of furniture and this began the trend for Indian style furniture, which later became a major craft industry involving a number of entrepreneurs throughout India. Revival of Nirmal Furniture in Andhra, carved furniture of Pondicherry, Madurai, Mysore and Goa came up also. Her indefatigable interest and energy reached out to craftspersons in the remote corners of Himachal, to the isolated weaving centres of Arunachal Pradesh, the border towns of Punjab. The examples are multitudinous.

Today India is in a much more fortunate situation pertaining to the preservation and evolution of its craft than most countries of the world because of the work carried out at the initial development stage.

Perhaps in the emphasis placed on evolving a market for handicrafts and getting the Brahmins of the Planning Commission to accept it as an economic activity, the aspect of looking at every creative expression as a commodity was emphasized. The fact that it was necessary to differentiate between creative expression and commodification was neglected. Even the Regional Design Centres began to an-

swer the needs of the market, rather than the need of the craft community, except in the case of Calcutta Design Centre, which under the Directorship of Prabhas Sen began nurturing many craft groups.

The Design Centres did fulfil the need of the time by evolving a design and technological development programme, which could be extended to thousands of practitioners, who were facing poverty and starvation because of a shrinking local market, while the newly opened marketing centres needed goods that would meet the consumer demands. Yet instead of bridging the gap between the designer and the master craftsmen, which had grown during the colonial period, through the Government Arts and Crafts Schools, the separation of the master craftsmen and designers widened. There was no design centre of the government, which had a master craftsmen, as its Director. The master craftsmen remained always in a subordinate position being overruled by white-collar workers, who occupied administrative posts or painters trained in Arts Colleges. The National Institute of Design, which made the study of crafts an important part of their curriculum did not correct this situation. Not one master craftsmen was made a member of the faculty. They remained as craftsmen's in the workshop area. No attempt was made to have special scholarship or entry conditions making it easier for the children of master craftsmen to gain entry. Kamaladevi's pleas to change the approach fell on deaf ears.

On the other hand, Kamaladevi's inspirational qualities enthused craftspersons, private institutions, individuals and trusts. She even got the support of religious institutions to support the craft activities through their temple trusts. She involved well-known persons such as Rukmani Devi Arundale and her institution Kalakshetra to help the craft movement. Rukmani Devi revived the traditional weaves of Kanchipuram and Kamaladevi located initially the Vegetable Dye research Laboratory, with

Shri Chandramouli as the researcher, at Kalakshetra. Durga Bai Deshmukh set up Craft Teachers Training Regional Institutes. The great Rai Krishan Dasji set up a Textile wing in Bharat Kala Bhawan at Varanasi at the persuasion of Kamaladevi. Prabha Shah and Malati Jhaveri set up the Prajapati Pottery Centre at Dharavi in Mumbai in 1954 with a grant from the All India Handicrafts Board. Later they developed a voluntary organisation Sohan Sahakari Sangh by collecting membership from a large number of well-wishers from all over the country. Through the devoted work of Prabha Shah, who gave her entire life to reach out to craftspersons throughout the country, a number of craft centres were assisted to develop a range of products, which would meet the changing consumer demands.

The State Governments also took up initiative as in the case of the Mahabalipuram School of Architecture and Stone Carving, which was headed by the great Vaidyanathan Sthapati, Shilp Guru Ganapati Sthapati's father. The school had a 7 year training course for Sthapatis, who were trained according to the Shilp Shastras. The training was recognised by the state government's Educational Department. Shilp Guru Sthapathy in his report writes of Kamaladevi's involvement: "The Government College of Architecture and Sculpture, Mamallapuram, as it is known today, had its genesis under the Department of Industries and Commerce, Chennai, and nurtured under the direct supervision and guidance of Madam Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, the then Chairman of the "All India Handicrafts Board", New Delhi.

"At the time when the All India Handicrafts Board, is celebrating its 50th Anniversary, the Golden Jubilee, the one great personality to be remembered is Madam Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, without whose vision a number of training institutions could not have been started and the re-emergence of the dying arts embodying the spiritual culture of India, achieved. All of them came to life including the Training Centre in Mahabalipuram, during her

Chairmanship". It is this institute, which has focused attention on the traditional school of architecture. Has introduced the study and application of Vastu throughout India. It has brought Vastu into the international insights of the use of space. The traditional Sthapathis have also kept pace with modern technology, which has helped them to create monolithic sculptures. According to Shilp Guru Ganapati Sthapathi, if Kamaladevi had not nurtured this Institute at the formative stage, this would never have happened.

The Government of Bihar set up an Institute of Industrial Design headed by Shri Upendra Maharathi of Bihar, a well-known artist and a person who devoted his entire life to crafts development of Bihar were amongst those whose life became linked with the craft movement. He was sent for technical training abroad by the State Government and on his return developed a range of tools and techniques in bamboo, basketry, lacquering, which reduced the production time to one third, improved the finish and increased the earnings of traditions craftsmen families.

The concept of having a National Crafts Museum was one of the early decisions of the Board. It was set up in the early 50s itself with Dr. Prithwish Neogy, a renowned scholar as its Director. Prithwish, who was an extremely sensitive academician found it impossible to deal with the bureaucrats and resigned his job. Dr. Ajit Mookerjee, who had been running the Art and Industry in Calcutta joined the Crafts Museum. Kamaladevi thought that he would be able to build up the Museum with all the components of research and publications and give it an international standing. A noted scholar Shri S. K. Ray, who had done research on the Folklore of Bengal and linked the primeval traditions of the Delta with the Etruscans also worked with the Museum.

Ajit Mookerjee, who had begun his work on Tantric Art became totally involved with this research and the Crafts Museum was left to the clerical staff to keep up the

modicum of activity. Later Shri Sankho Choudhary was asked as a part of an exhibition on the Habitats of the rural communities to create a Rural Complex at the Exhibition Grounds, which he did most successfully and the Crafts Museum moved to the Exhibition Grounds. To Kamaladevi's great regret, the Crafts Museum, as a part of the Handicrafts Board and later as the office of the Development Commissioner was run by the officials of the Board and later by an official from the National Museum did not develop into a full-fledged Museum. She had collected rare examples of folk arts and crafts along with detailed information for the Crafts Museum during her extensive tours to the remote parts of the country and none of these were recorded or preserved. It was only with the appointment of Dr. Jyotindra Jain, as the Senior Director that the Crafts Museum developed into an active Museum of national standing.

Few know and realise that the All India Handicrafts Board carried out supportive and protective policies for the sector as a whole with a small budget and none of the activities were subsidized. The success of these programmes can perhaps be judged by the large number of private initiative in craft production, to the proliferation of voluntary organisation, and craftspersons associations throughout the country. Many master craftsmen have become affluent and are marketing their products throughout India and participating in National and International Fairs. In economic terms we can measure that while in 1953-54 the export of crafts was 23 crores, today it touches over 9276.50 crores and it is 20% of the total exports of India. If we take the entire handicrafts and handloom sector one estimation puts the employment figure to 36 million people and the production figures triple.

In 1965 the first Presidential National Awards to Master Craftsmen were given by Dr. Radhakrishnan. The main objective of this scheme was to give recognition to the masters and to raise the status of master Craftsmen in

society. Research carried out in the different crafts had indicated that the children of master craftsmen were not continuing with the craft traditions, as they felt that they had no future and also felt that they were being discriminated against. It became therefore essential that every attempt should be made to raise the status of the masters, it was because of this that the National Awards for Master craftsmanship, with an Apprentice Training Scheme was initiated.

In the early years this scheme did have an impact on creating an awareness amongst the crafts community. They were made to feel that they were the inheritors of a great craft tradition and the public recognised their contribution. The caliber of the Masters, who were selected was the highest. Leaders of the craft communities such as Shri Ali Hasan, Thiru Vaidyanathan Sthapathi, Shambunath Karmakar, Acharya Parmeshwarachar and many others were highly respected. They took the fact of their recognition with great seriousness and saw it as an important responsibility towards the improvement of the conditions of the craft community. However, over the years the procedures became beaurocratized and there was lowering of the standards.

In 1967 Kamaladevi ceased to be the Chairman of the All India Handicrafts Board. This occurred rather abruptly and unceremoniously. It left a number of people saddened. For the craftspersons she still remained Hastakala Mata and they continued to come to her. She maintained her contacts with the craft world and concentrated on encouraging the Crafts Council of India and its regional branches to become more active. She also encouraged a number of individuals and institutions working in the areas of crafts. She recognised the highly talented Rajeev Sethi and encouraged him in his project of Bhole Bisrey, the settlement of the itinerant performing artists who were at the lowest rung of the creative artists.

Kamaladevi had said "1947 brought liberation to India

and to me personally. I felt released from political obligations and my pledge. Field work was my theatre of operations, creative expression my true vocation. I could go back to the work with the artisans and creative people". Now at this stage she was being freed from bureaucratic responsibilities and one of the major activities that she took up was to write and she brought out a number of publications on craft traditions. The most extraordinary book is her autobiography "Inner and Outer Spaces". She wrote as she travelled. She wrote as she sat in her room at the India International Centre, sharing her knowledge, her perceptions.

In a way this forced separation from the hurly burly of the daily demands of an area in the process of development, the frustrating bureaucratic approaches, gave her a distance from the craft situation and she could view it with the objectivity of a writer and her writings reflect her deep involvement and sensitivity to the crafts. Her contribution to UNESCO's publication *The Arts and Man: A World View of the Role and Functions of the Arts* in 1969 is a very sensitive rendering of the nuances of the role of crafts in our daily life.

India can be proud that it was an Indian initiative, through Kamaladevi, that World Crafts Council, an international organisation, affiliated to UNESCO with Regional Centres covering Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America and North America came into being. Though she was the Vice President of the organization, she however was responsible for creating its constitution and evolving the modus operandi. There is today a network of Crafts Council throughout the world and they meet regularly to share experiences, to assist each other and are a source of strength providing assistance to members throughout the world. They also reach out to craftspersons in their country. In some countries they are the only Crafts Organisation through which the government assists the craft community.

In India the Crafts Council of India was set up in 1964 and Kamaladevi persuaded active organisations and women participants to set up Crafts Councils in their regions. Soon a network of Crafts Councils was set up throughout the country. The Crafts Council of India met every year organised exhibitions and took up training and development projects. The Karnataka Crafts Council set up Vishwakarma Award for recognition of craftsmen and Delhi Crafts Council an Award for Children of Master craftsmen which are named after Kamaladevi. Each state Crafts Council initiated programmes in their own state according to their requirements and the interest of the members. The Crafts Council of India was initially meant to have its office rotated amongst the State Craft Organization, however after moving to Chennai, the Crafts Council of India continued to function from Chennai and built their headquarters and institutional structure. It failed to become an active advocacy platform for the craftspersons and the very large number of persons whose whole life depended on crafts. Their activities were essentially concentrated on maintaining international and national links, organizing of exhibitions and periodic conferences. The main role of influencing policy decisions and protecting and supporting the interests of the craft sector as active advisor to the government at the centre and state levels, never was achieved.

Kamaladevi to her very last days continued to work for crafts, enriching the country as a whole. India's experience, which was the first experience of evolving such an important and far reaching programme provided an example to many countries, who emerged from colonialism into sovereign countries, to evolve their own programme. India was their resource and it shared its experience. Ministers, heads of government departments, trainees came from all over the world. Mexico, North Africa, many African countries, from Pakistan, Philippines, South East Asia, Iran, Syria etc., to learn from the Indian experience.

Kamaladevi was invited to a number of countries to advise on the strategy of crafts development. A number of persons trained by her became advisors to international organisations and helped to shape the craft policies in many parts of the world. The craft movement owes a tremendous debt to Kamaladevi not only in India but throughout the world.

An adjunct to this chapter is a very personalized account of some intense experiences of the author when she worked with Kamaladevi in the field of Handicrafts to share with the reader the intimacy of the development process.

When Kamaladevi was involved in the search for traditional crafts that seemed worth saving and reviving, help came from most unexpected quarter. the venerable Sankaracharya of Kanchi Math. He had become popular for not only his high piety, but even more his human relationship with people, his easy accessibility.

While visiting the inner precincts of several temples, especially the underground basements where lay a medley of rare precious treasures, from cooking vessels to the most delicate temple lamps and puja articles. They had been set aside because they had a leak, a torn handle, a chip off the lid, these items could not be used in the temples, no matter how insignificant the blemish.

The temple had ample funds and could replace these abandoned treasure and restore them to their rightful place in the various rituals. Yet the temple authorities seemed indifferent and when it was suggested they shrugged their shoulders.

Somehow this struggle of Kamaladevi's with the officials reached the Sankaracharya's ear and he invited Kamaladevi to visit him. Before she could say anything he said to her that he understood what Kamaladevi's objective was and he fully agreed with her. He explained *sanskaras* sometimes tended to become mere external movements, the inner significance being often overlooked or even forgotten. Hence this indifference. "You are probably

aware that each form has a symbolic meaning. Each curve, each line says something. These objects are pregnant with eloquence, if you understand their language. The aesthetic value of its totality which as you say, you and the public appreciate, draws its quality from an inner vision."

Kamaladevi nodded and added, "I completely agree. All our old texts tell us that before a man creates any object he must meditate on it and depict the mental image he or she has conceived – intuition is total whereas logic is fragmentation, I believe, Swamiji. That is why these objects are invaluable. I am most indebted to you for your encouragement and your readiness to help."

The temples opened their doors. Rare pots, chembus, lamps were made available for reproducing for each played a special role in the general ceremonies. They were so beautiful that it was a feast to look on them.

Kalahasti Kalamkari

In 1956, no one had heard of *Kalamkari*, so when Kamaladevi, accompanied by U. S. Malliah and some of us, made a trip to Kalahasti to meet the last surviving master of this art, Jonnalagadda Lakshmajah, everyone wondered why we were going on a pilgrimage, bypassing Tirupati. Kora Ramamoorthy, the maverick artist, collector and antique dealer, had traced down the master craftsman and was joining us from Chennai.

We arrived at a narrow lane after searching for over an hour for the street. No one was at the street corner to meet us, as had been planned. (They were all busy making pineapple rasam for Kamaladevi.) We wasted time and she was most upset and irritable. Once she met the master craftsman, however, she forgot her anger and sitting in his simple home, she sipped her rasam appreciatively. No one could believe that this great leader was at home with these simple people. The master craftsman, who had earlier categorically refused Ramamoorthy to restart making kalamkari and train his son and other young men in the

art, was convinced to do so by Kamaladevi. Sitting in the little room the first Apprentice Training Scheme under Master Craftsman was developed. Kora Ramamoorthy would supervise the centre, the master craftsman would be paid an honorarium, and stipends would be given to the students.

In 1958, when the all India Handicrafts Board had a limited budget, the scheme started with a tiny amount, less than Rs. 10,000/- and a beginning was made to revive a dying art. Before the government sanctioned the money, Kamaladevi bought the cotton long cloth used for *kalamkari* from her personal funds and gave an advance to the master for purchasing materials to prepare the dyes. Young boys began to learn to process cloth, prepare dyes, and draw the minor figures.

The work of the first batch was displayed above the old Cottage Industries Emporium, which created great excitement and one batch followed another. Over the years the number of practitioners multiplied. Today there are over a thousand *kalamkari* artists spread all over India. Many of these masters work with their wives, and the themes used in this are not just confined to the Ramayana, but are drawn from the Bible and the Panchatantra and other themes. A new dimension has been given to *kalamkari*, which has grown into an exciting contemporary form of expression.

Poochampalli

Behind the Charminar in Hyderabad, Kamaladevi came across the bold patterned Tillia Rumals. We are told that, they came from Poochampalli and not from Chirala and the weavers were in great difficulties. It was the month of May and much to the annoyance of the Industries Department, Kamaladevi decided to visit Poochampalli.

We set out at the crack of dawn in a jeep. Kamaladevi sat in the front and the Industries officials at the back. It was a road used only by bullock carts thus the jeep had to

swing from one side to the other to manoeuvre the ruts on the road and avoid the cactus hedges on either side. With a wet towel on her head, her thick sari wrapped around her, she sat silent except to tell me, "I learnt from Bapu to keep a wet towel over my head in great heat." After a nerve-wrecking drive of a couple of hours we arrived at a tiny hamlet and were taken to the cooperative society. What we needed was water to drink and there was none, so a man was sent up a coconut tree and we quenched our thirst with the water of tender coconuts. I suddenly noticed blood trickling down her left arm—the cactus scratches had left their mark.

The weavers all clustered around us and told us of not being paid enough for their work, not having a steady market. Kamaladevi asked them, if they could weave a sari there could be a good market for them. They hesitated, saying, "We can only weave 60 counts and no one will wear such thick saris! We have never made a continuous pattern." Then added, "we will make mistakes then who will pay for the warp? We have to make a warp for three saris." Kamaladevi insisted right away that she would pay for the warp and they would get twice the wages for weaving the sari warp than for the rumals.

The first three saris came one month later for a total sum of Rs. 120/-. The Central Cottage Industries Emporium then ordered the first set of saris and two weavers came all the way to deliver them. Kamaladevi saw to it that they were paid immediately. A link was established and the weavers began to weave regularly, transferring their skills to weaving the household linen and yardage. Two weavers were sent to Varanasi to learn silk weaving and they introduced *silk ikat* sari. After that what happened is history. The demand grew so that other weaver villages, too, began to weave *ikats*. Not only Poochampalli, but also the entire district of Nalgonda prospered. These weavers who were only able to weave in 60 counts are now weaving very fine quality silk sari in double ikat.

Jaipur Blue Pottery

Kamaladevi's persuasive powers were great. Gayatri Devi of Jaipur was persuaded to make a building and funds available for an art school. Kirpal Singh Shekhawat, painter, muralist par excellence, who had studied at Shantiniketan and later in Japan, under well-known masters, was persuaded to head the Art School. Miniature painting, carving and pottery making, were the subjects, which were taught to the young artist. Kirpal Singh became fascinated with blue pottery and decided to revive the old traditions of tiles and of utensils. He studied the old tiles in the Cenotaphs of the Maharajas and the Museum pieces and with help of old potters, began the creation of exquisitely painted blue pottery.

Large *surahis*, vases, plates, table tops and even murals were created and a number of persons were trained. Soon other workshops came up and a number of young masters began to produce pottery for sale. However, Kirpal Singh's work with his masterly kalam and flow of line and sense of colour and design remain even today the finest.

Kirpal Singh insisted that Kamaladevi should visit his home and meet his mother. When we arrived a distinguished old lady looked accusingly at Kamaladevi and said, "So you are the great lady, who has persuaded my Rajput son to lose his caste and become a *kumbhar*." Kamaladevi smiled and said to her "The Day of the sword is gone! Your son has conquered the world with his flowing kalam." Thus mollifying the old lady.

Nandra Buti in Indigo

As Kamaladevi travelled in Madhya Pradesh the tribal women in printed blue skirts with bold printed pattern of a shrub enlivened the landscape. When we asked what was the name of the cloth, we were told *Nandra Buti*. Searching for the printers of Nandra, we came to twin villages, Tarapur and Umedhpura, separated by a gently flowing river Gambheri Guraji. As we entered the village

an eight-foot high clay indigo vat greeted us and the printers said, this was a hundred years old and was still in use.

Thick cotton cloth was stretched on the sand and under the shade of the *kikar*, acacia, rough tables were laid out and women were printing the *nandra buti* in resist material on pale yellow mordanted cloth, before dyeing in with indigo. The atmosphere was soothing and Kamaladevi seated on a string charpoy contemplated the scene. The printers and their families sensed her mood and squatted around us waiting for her to talk to them. They whispered, "Sarkar has come to us!" They had innumerable problems of getting the appropriate raw material. Finding a market indebtedness to the dealer and very low wages. Kamaladevi's suggestion was why don't you print on the *Kosa* material, which was thick and also not finding a market and produce a new product of printed 'inexpensive' silk, which could be in consonance with their expertise.

How would they print on silk, they asked. How will they degum? What will be the effect? Who will buy their products? An enterprising Joint Director of Industries, Shri Bordia promised to deliver the *Kosa*, along with a textile dye expert, who would help them to degum and dye. Kamaladevi's enthusiastic support carried the day. Within a month the *kosa* was delivered, the cloth was degummed and miracle of Nandra printed *kosa slik* saris were created and were on display at the Madhya Pradesh Emporium.

Rescuing Toda Embroidery

Kamaladevi always helped Shri Venkataramn, a silent and diligent worker of the Servants of India Society, and an old friend of Kamaladevi. He had done pioneering work in the tribal belt in the Nilgiri. As Chairman of the Handicrafts Board, she helped to preserve the beautiful Toda embroidery, which had ancient links with ancient Greek Embroidery. The richly embroidered Pothkulli was the toga like garment worn by the men and women and had an

important ritual significance for them. "The well-meaning missionary women engaged in transferring the embroidery to household linen items, were destroying its native glory."

The Toda community, which was highly inbred were being decimated by venereal disease and the local Rotary club made available a medical van which reached out to the isolated Toda settlements. Kamaladevi described that "A special centre was set up in charge of a young Toda lady with formal education, which had unsettled her native taste. She preferred the pale characterless simplified work introduced by the Christian Missions to the gorgeous original designs and resented my insistence on keeping to the traditional. But as the women who actually did the stitching were very cooperative, we were able to turn out a large range of garments, curtains, bedspreads, all carrying the dazzling real Toda work".

Years later Kamaladevi met the same rebellious Toda lady of the Centre. She had married a German had travelled in the west and *seen the world* as she put it, and learned incidentally that the demand was for the *traditional*. She promised to continue to devote herself to keep it going.

The Toda women and men continue to use the traditional Poothakulli even today and young women sing their haunting songs as they embroider for themselves and a growing market.

Stone Sculpture of Mahabalipuram

Vaidyanathan Sthapathi was one of the most learned and versatile creative persons. As a true Sthapathi he could caste a bronze for the *garb griha* of the temple, design a temple complex and even create the detailed rendering of stone figure or a *gopuram*. Kamaladevi respected him greatly and encouraged his work at the Mahabalipuram School of Sculpture, where young apprentices were taught in the traditional manner. It was a rigorous seven years

training programme. When an architect wanted to join the course, the Sthapathi laughingly told Kamaladevi, that the student will have to unlearn what he has learnt to become a true Sthapatihi.

The school for sculpture had only a limited number of students when it first began, but the work carried out by Vaidyanathan Sthapathi and his son Ganapathi Sthapathi in developing the sculptures created a growing demand and a large number of stone carvers and other young men joined the courses.

Today the road to Mahabalipuram is full of workshops where masters and their students are busy creating the needs of the gods and households.

Vegetable Dye Research

Rukumani Devi Arunadale and Kamaladevi not only shared a love of Performing Arts, but also of craft traditions. Kamaladevi always admired Rukumani Devi's collection of sarees. She persuaded her to set up a few looms in Kalakshetra for copying her collection. Though silk of the finest quality was available and so were the weavers, the art of vegetable dyes however was lost. Kamaladevi proposed to set up a dye research laboratory in Kalakshetra. The Handicrafts Board under Kamaladevi sanctioned the funds. A dye chemist, Shri Chandramouli was hired to initiate work on experimenting with different materials and prepare a range of dyes. Work began on collecting old dye recipes and experimenting with them. Later the Dye Research Centre was transferred to Bangalore to the Central Handicrafts Development Centre. Painstaking work was carried out and a range of dyes were developed.

After Kamaladevi left the Handicrafts Board the dye research ran into a great deal of problems. Those in power felt that this was a wasted effort and it had no future. The funds were reduced and thus no extension work was carried out. It is strange that impetus to introduce it into the field came from outside. Ruby Gaznavi, a remarkable

woman from Bangladesh, who was reviving vegetable dyes, in Bangladesh, took the services of Mr. Chandramouli on loan and produced a range of Dacca sarees. She ran a workshop and private designers from India travelled to Dacca to join the workshop. To Kamaladevi's joy, a movement began for vegetable dyes. Chandramoudi, who had been neglected was lauded for his work and Kamaladevi's faith in the importance of maintaining traditional skills was vindicated.

It was this foresight of hers that the core work on vegetable dye was carried out and it has been of great assistance to the printing and dyeing industry; as well as the garment industry, when the ban on certain chemical dyes and mordants by the importers of fabrics in Europe adversely affected our markets. Today there is a growing appreciation of vegetable dyed fabrics in India and throughout the world.

6

PERFORMING ARTS

Girjabai had a deep involvement in music and played a number of musical instruments, Kamaladevi thus was exposed to a real appreciation of classical music. She not only learnt to play a range of musical instruments, as well as the piano, but she also learnt to sing with teachers giving her lessons in Carnatic and Hindustani music. Her mother was very fond of Das Vani, the bhajans of the saints and Kamaladevi learnt many of them, which she used to hum to herself whenever she faced difficult moments in her life. Her family used to sponsor the ritual performance, which entailed the whole range of creative talent, thus enthralling her by the richness of the traditional rituals. The celebration of the Bhuta rituals brought into play the creativity of making the costumes from natural materials and fabrics, decorations with flowers, painting of the shrines, making of bell metal jewellery and wooden masks. Then there was the dramatic performance of the ritual with music, burning torches, bon-fires, fire works, creating a mystical world and transporting the performers and the viewers into a state of ecstasy. She also saw the performance of the Yakshagana, which was carried out adjacent to her home. Puppeteers, travelling performers were patronised by the family. It was in this atmosphere that her formative years were spent.

She too wanted to enact plays and create a world of her own into which she could carry the viewers. This was impossible as women did not perform on the stage. Her first possibility to act in a school play was prevented by

objections from the conservative society of Mangalore.

It was with Harindranath, her husband that she was able to fulfil this dream when they began to perform his plays and presented them in different parts of the country. In this way breaking the taboo on performance of women on the stage.

When she went to England to join Harindranath she was looking forward not only to continuing her studies, but continuing with her piano lessons in a more organised manner and seeing the theatrical performances in Europe. It was on their return to India and settling down in Mangalore that they could realize their dream of setting up a theatrical group, which performed throughout India.

Harindranath wrote a number of plays in operatic forms. They experimented with simple sets, costumes and lights and travelled to different cities drawing large crowds. G. Venkatachellum was closely associated with their acting career and travelled with them. A number of plays were written in verse on the Maharashtrian saints, who were Girjabai's favourite. The short plays were on Tukaram, Jayadev, Saku Bai, Eknath and Pundalik. Tukaram was the most popular and they staged it all over India. He also wrote social plays. The "Sleeper Awakened", "Returned from Abroad", the "New Toy Cart" and "The Black Ship". Venkatachellum wrote that Kamaladevi and Harindranath had excellent voices and "their plays performed in Madras, Bombay, Poona, Bangalore, Colombo and other towns to packed houses. "I was closely associated with their productions in all these places and I know how popular and what box office successes they were. Once in Bombay we broke all records by filling Excelsior theater to overflowing and sending away hundreds without seats. Our Ooty Season shows at the Assembly Rooms, year after year were the best the station had known for a long time".

Venkatachellum described her performing on the stage with her flowing long hair, her charismatic personality and her beauty, which enraptured audiences as they

listened to her mellifluous voice, when she sang Harindranath's poetry set on to music and composed for her.

Though she gave up her acting career when she joined the freedom movement actively, she continued her association with music and dance through her friends. She was a close friend of the dancer Menaka. She also supported Ragini Devi despite the rather traumatic associations with her relationship to Harindranath. She also became a close friend of Rukmini Devi Arundale, as well as Balasaraswati. The film maker Bhavnani and his wife were close friends involved her into acting for a film.

In 1944 she set up the Indian National Theatre (INT), Bombay. It was a pioneering theater organisation which took theatre to the people from all walks of life. Though India had a rich dramatic heritage it was confined either to ritualistic theater or hereditary performers who had a very low status in society. The genius of the traditional performers had to be adapted to modern conditions and contemporary social needs. Her introduction to European experimental theatre in Germany when she saw the plays of Brecht, had left a deep impression on her and she felt that India too could carry out experimentation with new forms. The starting of the INT was thus not only to work on the revival of a tradition but it was to be an organisation that would nurture the creation of a new approach. She wrote "The Time was auspicious, for India was in the throes of her rebirth as a free country. It was a purely amateur venture but soon proved itself to be a strong organisation with the nucleus of a devoted band of artists and workers willing to dedicate themselves with earnestness to the cause of the theatre. It was a new field they were entering with few landmarks to guide them, few signposts to beckon - For the Indian stage had fallen on evil days. With the general social and economic decline in the country, the theatre too had lapsed from its ancient lofty status, and under the impact of the Western influence

that lent a superficial veneer to our cultural forces, it had become a hybrid product, devoid of proper standards. A hard task lay ahead for the INT workers in recreating the Indian Theatre, with the background of the past, the flavour of a new India and an off-shoot of the modern times vibrating with the strong currents of the western culture, its dynamism, ideas and techniques – To be faithful to the best in each, was to find the synthesis that was to be key note of this new organisation”.

Like all movements it had to face many difficulties. Lack of funds, equipment and a regular group of performers. The obstacles only spurred the workers and artists to action. Kamaladevi used all her resources to find funds and even invested some of her own money. Soon the I.N.T. had gone into production and was in full swing. Kamaladevi though saw INT more as a movement rather than an organisation involved only in organising theatre activities, she saw it as an institution which would further and develop a range of cultural activities such as dance, music, poetry, folklore, puppet shows etc. it also organised exhibitions of paintings and sculpture; Mushairas and demonstrations of various types of dances. These included folk forms and peoples participatory festivals such as Ras, Dandia Ras, Garbha etc.

The most outstanding production was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's "DISCOVERY OF INDIA" produced by Shanti Bardhan for I.N.T. to be presented in Delhi before the Asian Relations Conference in April 1947. It was most successful and presented a ballet, which derived its inspiration from traditional forms moulded into a contemporary form and represented an Asian character. The Asian Delegates responded with great enthusiasm and at the end of the show the audience called for the author. Prime Minister Nehru came on the stage and said – “You asked for the author and forced me to come on the stage. But you know that I have nothing to do with this presentation. Those who have worked ceaselessly to make it a success

are a different people. For that you must thank the artistes. I think this show is better than the book itself, and it has enhanced the beauty of the book. I hope this presentation has brought home to you the panorama of India history and made you feel the great and the glorious past. I am also glad that it has revealed the future in its true perspective.” Kamaladevi was very happy and thanked Shanti Bardhan, though earlier she had expressed doubts about entrusting the production to a communist.

The activities of the Bombay I.N.T. and their success soon inspired I.N.T. groups to come up in different parts of India. Kamaladevi however, cautioned the group of workers to move slowly towards a formation of an all India body. In April 1950 the All India organisation was inaugurated in Bombay. This National organisation had 14 Branches spread out over the entire country.

The eight years of steady and mounting success had belied scepticism of people who regarded amateur groups as short-lived. The I.N.T. with the dynamic leadership of a group of organisers and performers moved from strength to strength, from one activity to another, each designed to enrich and vivify the theatre as a movement. Some of its activities were of a pioneering nature and novel in concept. Damu Jhaveri through his lifetime devoted himself to the promotion of INT.

In the early stage the theatre movement suffered obviously from certain limitations. There were hardly any theaters and the few available were beyond the means of the amateur group. The Bombay I.N.T. decided that if people could not easily come to their shows, the I.N.T. would go to them and they planned to organise a mobile stage that could go to the working class slum area and do the villages. Kamaladevi was always innovative and she began writing to her friends to get help and ideas. The mobile stage had limitations, the scope for make-up and quick changes of costumes were limited. Similarly, scenery and draperies, not to speak of the number of artists, had to

be reduced to the minimum. This also was a break from the accepted norms of the proscenium theater and necessitated the creation of new forms, which would have popular appeal and yet lend themselves to the mobile stage. Two outstanding productions on the mobile stage were "Bharat-ki-Kahani" and "By 1951". The latter dealt with the food problems in India and an exhortation to produce more.

It built up a commendable reputation for the quality and originality of its shows, while adhering to the Indian character in its essence. I.N.T.'s another important contribution was the start of a Children Theatre movement, which was inaugurated in Bombay in 1950 by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, INT presented a children's ballet "Bavlo", on the lines of the Walt Disney's Pinocchio.

Another equally important and new activity was the Theatrical Services the I.N.T. provided to the amateur groups through its remarkable collection of costumes, ornaments, settings, and equipment along with expert guidance.

Later the INT transferred its regional branches to Bharatiya Natya Sangh, which became an important organisation based in New Delhi and headed by Kamaladevi as its President. Practically every state had an active branch, which assisted amateur theatre groups and tried to encourage experimentation to perform plays in the local language so as to have a greater appeal to large audience. It was through her efforts that she got a grant from UNESCO for the Bharatiya Natya Sangh to set up an Asian Theatre Institute with Mini Boga as its first Director, which was later taken over by Ebrahim Alqazi and became the National School of Drama.

In 1952 the government set up Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi through a gazette notification in May 1952 to assist in developing and supporting programmes in the performing arts. Kamaladevi was appointed as the Vice Chairman with Ms. Nirmala Joshi as the Secretary. During their period when Kamaladevi was Vice President

a number of well-known personalities were appointed as Chairman of the Akademi. They were only figure heads and did not interfere with the work of the Akademi. It was only when Indira Gandhi was appointed Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, with Kamaladevi as Vice Chairman, that there were a number of disagreements. Kamaladevi was very much in the saddle and did not brook any interference. She wrote in her memoirs, that she wrote to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, asking him to tell his daughter, not to interfere in her work.

Kamaladevi was appointed as the fifth President of the Akademi. Kamaladevi and Nirmala Joshi worked together to set up Sangeet Natak Akademi in all the states and also encouraged the setting up of institutions for promoting dance, music and theatre organisations. She travelled throughout the country and encouraged young performers, set up scholarship schemes and built a structure for supporting the performing artists. They instituted Awards to recognize the great exponents and it became a yearly event, which everyone looked forward to, as the award was followed up by scintillating performances, which thrilled the audiences. She mentions in her autobiography that she got tremendous support from the government and had less problems with the bureaucracy in her work with the Performing arts than with the Handicrafts Development.

The first Sangeet Natak Akademi Award ceremony was conducted at the Red Fort. It was a magnificent setting and decorated in the traditional style with gold embroidered *masnads*, *goutakia* and a galaxy of great musicians, dancers. The *nobat* and the *shehnai* played from the *nobat khana*, this time not for the royalty, but for the new aristocracy the divine artists. Photographs of the event show Kamaladevi regally lead the way and we are told that her joy and beauty radiated in the assembly.

She travelled in the 50's with Komal Kothari, the enthusiastic young ethnomusicologist, into the interior of

Rajasthan, encouraging him in his field research to locate local musicians, and different forms of local theatre as well as to make a collection of traditional musical instruments. Devi Lal Samar was encouraged to set up his institution for theatre. She visited Guru Amobi Singh in Manipur, one of the greatest Manipur gurus and also encouraged the vital theatre movement in Imphal, where the artists had pooled their limited resources to build a theatre in Imphal.

She travelled in Southern India organising theatre workshops, locating traditional performers, groups of traditional theatre, as well as puppetry. She encouraged the Gurus of different schools of classical music and dance to set up their own organisation and located obscure talented young performers, with the help of Venkatachellum. People have short memories, but many young aspiring dancers were given their first exposure by Kamaladevi. The first solo performance of Yamini Krishnamurti was organised by Kamaladevi and Yamini had stunned everyone by her lyrical and breath-taking performance. Yamini was having problems with the Sangeet Bharati, where she was teaching and she helped her even though at the cost of upsetting some of the organisers. In Delhi a number of cultural institutions Indian National Theatre, Bharatiya Kala Kendra, Triveni Kala Sangam, Sangeet Bharati, Natya Ballent Centre and others came up and Kamaladevi was there to advise everyone and help them. It was Kamaladevi, who was responsible for organising exciting events in cultural fields through the Sangeet Natak Akademi. Such as the first National Dance Seminar where all the Gurus and renowned dancers of the Major dance forms gathered together to discuss and to perform. This was when the famous episode took place when Rukmini Devi and Balasaraswathy clashed and Bala had the last word, which is still talked about amongst the connoisseurs and the historians of performing art.

Before the work done by Kamaladevi the music, dance and theatre traditions could be seen only at temples, in

royal courts, at rare conferences or in the homes of courtesans, now it began to be performed on the stage and music and dance conferences began to happen all over the country. Music and dance became a part of the school activities and a part of the formal educational system. People from all walks of life began to take up dance and music as profession. Mrinalini Sarabhai daughter of Anu Swaminathan, a close friend of Kamaladevi had Mrinalini trained by a traditional Guru. Mrinalini mentions that Kamaladevi was most supportive when she continued with her dance as the daughter-in-law of Sarabhai as well as when she began her Dance School Darpana in Ahmedabad. There were many others who came from well known families and joined the dance profession. Kumudani Lakhia whose maiden name was Jayakar, joined the dance group of Ram Gopal in the early 50s and later through a scholarship from Sangeet Natak Akademi, studied Kathak under the great Guru Shambu Maharaj and was responsible for making an immense contribution to Kathak as a dance form through her training of the finest dancers at her school Kadam in Ahmedabad. Her contribution in choreography is perhaps one of her greatest contributions. In Mumbai the Jhaveri sisters learnt Manipuri and created an awareness of this highly evocative dance form. Damayanti Joshi, a well known dancer from a Brahmin family popularised Kathak. This was possible because of the climate created by Rukmini Devi and Kamaladevi for the acceptance of the performing arts. Each of these dancers remember the help and support that they received from Kamaladevi.

Kamaladevi also saw the close links of the performing arts with the other arts. During her visit to the school of dance or traditional dance style of Mayurbhanj, run by the local Raja, she learnt that a mask-maker had to learn how to dance before she learnt to make the masks, to be used in the dance. She began to see the close links between the performing arts and crafts. All traditional performances

had close links with crafts. The Ramnagar Ramlila employed the extraordinary skilled effigy makers, who created the giant figures of Kumbhkaran and Surpanakha. They also prepared the decorative Tazia for the Muharram, as well as the kites for the Uttar Kite Festivals. The brass repousse makers made the masks for the Gods, known as *chehras*, faces, which were supposed to have super natural qualities. Wood carvers carved wooden masks for Sai Jatra and wooden puppets for the puppeteers. Painters of myths created the first audio visual shows. Every region had their own specialised performers and specialist who catered to their needs. This planted the idea in her mind of the need to set up a Theatre Crafts Museum which had its early beginnings at Taj Barracks, a World War hutments on the Janpath. The humdrum office of the AIHB at the Taj Barracks which had been given two rooms for the Theatre Crafts Museum initially, was transformed, when the puppeteers Malu Ram, his wife Mouri and Nourang sat in the corridors repairing the puppets and singing their songs and preparing a new play on family planning at Kamaladevi's encouragement. The new Chief Executive Officer explained to her that the discipline of the office was being eroded by these itinerant performers. She told him the office was here for these craftsmen and not the other way around. These two rooms later grew into the trust of Shri U. S. Malliah Theatre Crafts Museum, with a rare collection of masks, puppets, costumes, effigies from all over India collected by the devoted and knowledgeable Inder Razdan, who had worked closely with Shanti Barhan at the Little Ballet Theatre, and spent a life time researching and reviving the dormant skills. The Trust was able to put up a building and house the collection. Shri Gopi Krishnan, a protege of Kamaladevi, was put in charge of the Museum along with Inder Razdan. Unfortunately neither Gopi Krishnan nor Inder Razdan were good administrator or organisers. With the result that the Museum never really took off.

Unfortunately Inder Razdan is no longer with us and the Theatre Crafts Museum remains in a pathetic state, which saddens the heart of all those who are friends and admirers of Kamaladevi. For they know how close this institution was to Kamaladevi's heart.

Today the performing arts in all the fields are flourishing. The traditional performers, who had no status in society before independence, when they were treated as mere entertainers, and were associated with the lowest rungs of society, today they are the aristocrats of our society and greatly respected and regarded. Women and men from all walks of life have taken to the performing arts as their profession. I think in this Kamaladevi's role had been of paramount importance.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Despite the statement made by powerful women leaders such as Sarojini Naidu "I am no feminist", it was these dynamic women who fought for women's participation in the political arena as equal partners. Their active participation in the freedom struggle was closely linked with women's rights and thus they were able to get support, often grudgingly for the women's cause. Gandhiji though was the one political leader who did give his full support for equal rights of women. Kamaladevi emerged not only as a forerunner in the fight for Independence and an active part of the youth movement, as well as an active participant of the Socialist movement within the Congress Party, which challenged the old guard, but she worked throughout her political career organising the women's movement.

Her early mentor was Pandita Ramabai, the great Sanskrit scholar, who lived upto her father's principles. He had been driven out of his community as he had taught Sanskrit to his wife and later to his daughter, which was forbidden by the Brahmanical traditions. Ramabai continued with her study of Sanskrit and was thus acclaimed as Pandita. She also started the Mahila Samaj and worked for the education and uplift of the women. She was the first woman to become a full-fledged member of the Indian National Congress and promoted women's participation in the political movement.

Annie Besant was Kamaladevi's "guiding star" whom her mother held out as an example to her. She was the first

woman to be President of the Indian National Congress in 1917.

Margaret Cousin known as Gretta, was her real mentor who worked along with a number of women to press for women's political rights, when they petitioned the British Secretary of State the women's franchise in 1917. Despite being rebuffed by the Secretary of State the women continued to press for their demands. Women in Britain had not been granted franchise till that time and the colonial rulers found it difficult to accept giving the right to vote to Indian women. At the Presidential address to the Congress Session in end 1917, Sarojini Naidu and others pressed their demand at the Congress Session in end 1917, and were supported by a large majority. In 1920 the Madras State Provincial Legislature opened its membership to women and Gretta persuaded Kamaladevi to stand for the Legislature despite the fact that she was not even registered on the voting list. These difficulties were overcome and with very little time for their campaign they evolved a novel way of promoting their cause. Harindranath encouraged Kamaladevi in this endeavour. He developed plays, composed songs and actively participated in the campaign. Though Kamaladevi lost, it was by a narrow margin of 600 votes. Kamaladevi was the first woman to fight an election to the Legislature.

In 1917 Margaret Cousin set up Women's Indian Association with 12 branches in most parts of India. She was able to use this network in reaching out to women. In January 1927 an All Women's Educational Conference was held in Pune where 7000 women participated. They discussed a range of issues for women's representation on educational boards, dealing with text book, syllabus, etc. They demanded a change in priorities so that women's needs could be met. It was quite a radical approach in which sex education, hygiene, as well as a flexible approach to education depending on the location was proposed. Given the conservative manner in which educational

institutions were run these were very progressive ideas. Though some rather antediluvian ideas such as a resolution for teaching women to "home beautiful" and "ideal motherhood" were also included, which have come in for criticism from the later women's movement. At this meeting of the women's Educational Conference with Margaret Cousin and Maharani of Baroda as President and Saarojini Naidu as Vice President, Kamaladevi was elected as the organizational Secretary.

Kamaladevi threw herself into her work with zeal making Pune her base. Staying at Ramabal's Seva Sadan, she travelled the length and breadth of the country. In 1928 she organised the 3rd Educational Conference, as well as campaigned for the Central Legislative Assembly to pass important legislation such as the Sharda's Child Marriage Restraint, for prevention of child marriage, as well the Age of Consent Bill and issues which greatly affected the lives of women.

The women leadership realized that the scope of the women's movement needed to embrace all aspects of the political movement and the nature of the organization had to change. It was therefore decided to set up the All India Women's Conference. Kamaladevi was voted the Secretary. The All India Women's Conference (AIWC), which had its beginnings by seeking educational reforms now expanded its objectives and widened its parameters. Kamaladevi began her work of mobilizing women for joining the political movement. AIWC was now amongst the early pioneers of many important causes. It took up the problems and welfare of children and drew up a Children's Charter, the first of its kind not only in India, but also possible internationally. It also campaigned on the food front for the use of the traditional indigenous foods, specially for children, to counter the industrial products, which were western imports. Emphasis was placed on the superiority of breast feeding, a campaign, which has only recently been introduced in the west and taken up by

international organizations. It pursued for the supply of adequate and good milk specially during the war years, when expectant mothers and children suffered from its lack the most. When National Government were set up later in the Indian States, the project for supply of milk was pressed upon each of them, starting, with Bombay, which was the first to respond, and resulted in the Government taking on milk supply for the public, later followed by other states. Bombay was also the first city to launch family planning on a nation-wide scale. Where there were no special public clinics, private doctors were approached to take up this problem and vigorous propaganda to limit families was carried out on various fronts.

The AIWC also took up promotion of cultural expressions and forms. Folk dances, music and indigenous dramatic forms were encouraged amongst women organizations. Handicrafts were actively promoted through small training and production centres by the various branches. At the annual session of the Conference, each branch was expected to put on cultural shows by its members, and also organise exhibitions of crafts. Other problems like consumer protection, social and moral hygiene, in fact every aspect of the life of the women and family were covered.

Study of problems relating to women labour received special attention. These were not merely recommendations, but actual surveys were carried out to study their conditions in various sectors. Kamaladevi covered some of the plantation labour, also labour in mines and similar isolated sectors. Kamaladevi decried the neglect of women's participation in the trade unions and in one of her speeches pointed out that the trade unions had failed to protect women's interests. This led to legislative reforms adapted to benefit women and child labour.

Countrywide social reform movement initiated at the end of the 19th century and carried forward by many noted leaders into the 20th century had been organised into a single national body named the Indian Social

Reforms Conference. As several of these social workers were also in politics, It used to hold its annual session along with the Indian National Congress to achieve maximum attendance and achievement.

At the Madras session of National Congress Meeting, Kamaladevi was requested to organise the women volunteers on behalf of the Seva Dal. She came into active contact with the social reform workers. Prominent among them was Shri Venkataraman, a member of the Servants of India Society, he persuaded Kamaladevi to become an active member and Secretary of the Indian Social Reform Conference.

Kamaladvi made a study of the women's movements in the West and in her writing said that, she realized how important it was to have the motivation to be able to actively fight for ones rights. "The basic realisation that strengthened within me was that society was indivisible even as one saw the global community shape after weltering through the agonies of two world wars. The main aim of this social reform movement was correcting the dangerous imbalances in our socio-economic organism. One confrontation here was between the blind forces that opposed any compulsive changes and those whose vision, sensitivity and maturing experience pointed to changes. In this forward movement the well-being of the society as a whole was sought, irrespective of sex, creed and social caste. In this India displayed a very important principle. For in the West, instead of a cohesive social current the society had broken into two rigid sex groups. the unhappy results of which time has only served to accentuate. There has continued a harsh confrontation between men and women, this trend getting more and more stratified, distorting the very premises and therefore drawing erroneous conclusions. One unfortunate trend has been women wanting to ape men which often ends in pathetic results leading to no solution. The women have been showing a subtle undercurrent of prejudices against womanhood as though

they regretted being born women because of several natural functions that went with it. I saw this as the great tragedy of women isolating themselves from a cohesive society."

As Kamaladevi's involvement with the Indian Social Conference deepened she became conscious of the widening of the parameters of her vision and activities, especially drawing inspiration from different leaders. In her travels she combined the programmes of the Women's Conference and the Social Reform Conference giving her activities a larger dimension and a deeper significance enabling her to think and function against a bigger canvas.

She writes "Working as a Secretary in the Social Reform Conference I savoured more deeply of the social reform movement and the many benefits it had brought to women through educative propaganda and establishment of fine institutions. I became aware of a close growing kinship. There was a placid but strength-giving quality about this movement which for me added a significant weight to the work I was engaged in".

The All India Women's Conference began actively to protect the women's interest. The first Round Table Conference 1930, had moved the idea of special electorates for women. which had been accepted by the government representatives. This was rejected by the AIWC and they put up a strong fight for a universal adult franchise. They felt that reservations based on gender would not only deny equal status to women, but would also lead to a conflict. Women as they said should walk along side with men and not behind them.

Kamaladevi was also committed to Family Planning at the time when the subject was taboo and no one even talked of it. She felt women had a right over their own person. It is interesting that even liberated highly educated men who would admire the ability of women to engage in open and free political discussion were shocked when Kamaladevi talked of the need of family planning; "a

women has to wage a war against man, a war against her sexual dependence, so that he can no more chain and enslave her though children". With Ava Wadia and Dhanvantari Rau, Kamaladevi founded the Family Planning Association in 1930, and in 1934 a resolution was passed demanding government support and provision of facilities.

The Congress leadership was not very happy at the active stance of the AIWC and tried to criticize the women for lacking an in-depth knowledge of the reasons for inequality. Nehru tried to divert the women's criticism by claiming that it was the political situation and an economic system that was responsible for discrimination against women. Kamaladevi at the Youth Congress Session in Karachi in her Presidential address pointed out that the All India Congress Sessions had not only diluted the call for Puran Swaraj, but also the commitment to work for equal rights of women, which was their due as active participant in the freedom movement. She pointed out the large scale participation of women in agricultural work, but the denial of right to ownership of the land that they cultivated. Women participated in large numbers in the non-farm activities, which had been adversely effected by large industries and import of industrial products, yet they recieved no support. She marshalled a battery of facts and figures which she and a group of women had been collecting. Later she presented a report on the Status of Women at the Asian Relations Conference, which highlighted women's declining economic status.

In 1938 the All India Congress Committee set up a National Planning Committee (NPC) for future economic planning of India and a committee to discuss women's role in the planned economy, was set up later on 16th June 1939. "It was to deal with the place of women in the planned economy..... ranging from family life, employment, education and social customs that prevent women's participation in the economy". Devaki Jain in her paper

"Women's Contribution to Political Economy Then & Now" summarizes the key recommendation of the committee and points out that many of the recommendations were taken up once again in 1997.

The women fought for and pushed through important principles of civil rights, asking for equality, both in status and opportunities. The right to franchise, to represent and to hold public office. Right to health, which among other recommendations entails the need for a universal scheme of social insurance including maternity benefits, childcare etc. For the first time homework was mentioned on economic terms and the right to leisure for all women including those in the home was advocated. This was indeed a revolutionary approach, which was taken up much later in the rest of the world.

The question of rights of the child to education, health and also protection of the child from abuse and exploitation was taken up and the need to draw up a Children's Charter on these issues was emphasized.

In terms of economic rights, the most striking recommendation was the demand to recognize women's labour, both on the land and in the home, equal opportunities, equal wage for equal work, and protection from dangers in employment and it was pointed out that here government had to play a role to see that these were implemented.

This was revolutionary thinking and initiated when the rest of the world was not even thinking on these lines.

A Uniform Civil Code irrespective of religion was demanded to be codified, so that women would have rights to inheritance as daughters and as wives, as well as a right to ownership of their own property.

The government was asked to develop a well defined state policy to prevent discrimination on the basis of sex, and universal primary education to be provided to all girls and boys. The need for a uniform civil code to govern laws relating to marriage was mooted and marriage was also to be a monogamous contract under an All India Civil

Marriage Act, which would protect the rights of mother's guardianship. In the event of divorce, the custody of the child was to be given to the mother, except in cases when the mother was of an undesirable character.

Unfortunately, most of these issues and recommendations by the Committee were not incorporated into the first plan, and the women's role was considered only as a 'social' and 'welfare' issue. Nor was this oversight corrected in the later plans.

Devaki Jain in her paper writes "Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was perhaps the most effective, exemplary constructive worker that was 'thrown up' by the pre-independence decades. It is conventional to suggest that she was influenced by Gandhi. The Gandhian touch or Gandhian political economy was certainly the mode of the era; but she was not one of those who directly took the mantra or initiation from Gandhi. Hers was the strength of personal struggle and of course the 'inheritance' of spirit of revolution and rebellion that her mother inculcated into her".

EPILOGUE

Dr. Radhakrishnan said of Kamaladevi "She has the intelligence to think and the eloquence to transmit great ideas." She also had the courage to challenge those who were in power as she did when she was a young woman working in the freedom movement. Few took on Sardar Patel as she did and survived in the political arena. She even challenged Gandhi whom she revered. Kamaladevi took Gandhiji's teaching of pursuit of Truth to heart even if it meant challenging him. She was independent in her thinking and did not kow-tow to people in power. Gandhi, Nehru, Sardar Patel accepted her independence and respected her for it, but people of lesser stature could not. Indira Gandhi, who nursed grievances over the years was jealous of Kamaladevi's friendship with her father and she never forgave her for writing to Nehru to ask his daughter not to interfere in her work. When Indira Gandhi came into power she unceremoniously removed her from the various positions she held in the government. Pupal Jayakar, who was a part of Indira Gandhi's courtier, took over the craft area. Though Mrs. Jayakar paid lip service by praising Kamaladevi, as and when the occasion necessitated, she however began to undermine all the work that Kamaladevi had started by withdrawing support. What irked Kamaladevi and those who had worked with her, was the attempt made to try to wipe out her contribution. Many reports and catalogues, which came out when Pupal Jayakar directed the crafts sector, did not mention Kamaladevi's contribution.

During the emergency when Jaiprakash Narayan and the Gandhi Peace Movement were being investigated for malpractices, as a part of political vendetta, Kamaladevi was also harassed. There was no one to protect her and she felt very vulnerable and open to harassment by a sychophantic bureaucracy. This was the period when she was most depressed and felt that she had reached the lowest ebb of her life. This was the woman who had been given the highest honours in India and abroad, whose name was a legend in many parts of the world. People throughout India from all walks of life admired her and saw in her life, as an example to emulate.

In her last years India International Centre of which she was the Vice President became her work place and her main support. They provided her with the President's room and she spent most of her time surrounded by many of the staff members who were very caring of her. Her room became the centre for new ideas being discussed and formulated. People from all over the world came to visit her and discuss their ideas, their programmes and their problems. She had time for everyone, to listen to them, to help them not merely in words, but by supporting them, canvassing for them.

She however felt powerless and those in powers ignored her and she saw many of the institutions that she had built going downhill. The Handicrafts Board became a beaurocratic government organisation. The Central Cottage Industries Emporium which had been India's show-piece became a warehouse of poor quality crafts. In her autobiography she said "Both Faridabad and the Cottage Industries Emporium were deflowered when they were blossoming through a kind of vandalism under the title of 'Development'. Faridabad was made into a big industrial area, completely destroying its original character of a compact small town of self-help. The Emporium was stripped of its independent character, and made a subordinate unit. Delhi's rapid urbanization did the same to the

farms close to the city, for the city's rich moved on to them and made them their weekend holiday resorts". The Regional Design Centres, and other Technical Centres did not get active support and were marginalised. Bharatiya Natya Sangh was taken over by people who were not interested in the theatre movement and just vanished. It was impossible to even get access to any records. The Indian Cooperative Union also was gone. The Agriculture Cooperative experiment had failed a long time ago. The Theatre Crafts Museum lacked support. Razdan was an inspired researcher and designer, but not a good organisor and Gopi Krishnan, the devoted protegee of Kamaladevi, who had done good field work in the Cooperative movement was not cut out to manage a Theatre Crafts Museum and create a lively programme and thus a support for its activities. With the result that it never evolved into a vibrant institute. The only institutions which survived were those built by her with others as a part of poltical movement for freedom the All India Women's Conference, the Irwin College, which was a recognised educational institution and she had handed its running to professionals. Wherever she controlled the organisation and tried to run it herself they ran into problems. In her autobiography she talks of many of these institutions being either closed or losing the original concept and yet she say's "still when I look back I feel it was worth it, a span of life dotted with herculean efforts, memorable events, beset with pitfalls, all the same rewarding experiences of infinite value".

One of institutions that she was responsible in creating was the World Crafts Council and that has grown to cover the entire world. It provides an extraordinary network of practicing craftsmen, designers, researchers. In many countries it is the only organization, which nurtures the Design and Craft traditions of the country and UNESCO with its miniscule staff and limited funds is able to organise a number of schemes and raise the level of crafts and deal with burning issues through liaisoning with the Crafts

Councils throughout the world.

The Crafts Council of India, which was started by Kamaladevi has had a very chequered career. It began in Bombay, was moved to Delhi and had office bearers, who were handpicked by Kamaladevi. It was then moved to Chennai on the understanding that the headquarters would rotate to the different states, which never happened. They did have active branches throughout India and their work depended on the quality of the office bearers. They held annual meetings, attended international conferences, organised exhibitions, but the organisation did not become the active support of the millions of craftsmen who needed a platform. They did not take up issues, which would help to build up a leadership from amongst the craft community. In fact, they worked *for* the craft community not *with* the craft community. However the Kamaladevi Puraskar for children of craft families to assist them to continue their training along with their education organised by the Delhi Crafts Council was effective in encouraging the younger generations to hone their skills. Some of these young people have gone on to win awards. In a recent seminar celebrating the Golden Jubilee of Handicrafts, one of the criticism made by the Shilp Gurus was that they who are acclaimed on occasion, are not consulted by the government organisation or the Crafts Councils and do not serve in advisory capacity in the committees set up by them, thus they are not consulted when policies are formulated.

2003 was the year of Kamaladevi's centennial celebration and a number of events, seminars, exhibitions were organised celebrating the occasion. From the craft community Shilp Guru Gurappa Chetty, the Kalamkari artist, celebrated the occasion by inviting masters from all over and Kamaladevi grandson, Neel Chattopadhyaya inaugurated the function. It was a joyful occasion and reminded me of the year 1955 when Kamaladevi, US Malliah, Venkatachellum and I went to meet Gurappa's father and the revival of this art, which was nearly lost began by

initiating an apprentice training programming. Today a number of artists have mastered the technique and have taken it far beyond the traditional skills, repertoire and aesthetics.

Gandhiji's greatness lay in evolving new ways to build a mass movement against the colonisers and to achieve freedom and see beyond the accepted political and social framework in developing his strategy. Kamaladevi's greatness lay in her contemporary approach to all the problems related to socio-cultural field. She was far ahead of her times. Today she lives on in the work that she began. Only a few remain who remember her personally, her devotion to the Living Cultural Traditions, not only in India, but the world over. Her work for women's rights was responsible not only for the legal support, but the creation of an atmosphere where women could participate on all aspects of political, economic and social life as equal partners in building the nation. Her spirit lives on in the work of people whom she nurtured and the myriads of skills, performing arts and creative expression for which she created the foundation in contemporary India.

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